Shin Megami Tensei / Persona Infinite Loops

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by HelenTheMoon

Summary

When the supercomputer known as Yggdrasil crashed, forcing people across the multiverse to relive their lives over and over again, some branches were more affected than the others. The most damaged branch was Mega Man. The one after it? That, is the branch known as Amala. Or as the Hub calls it... Shin Megami Tensei.

EDIT: Yes, this used to have a ton of fandom and character tags. I decided to remove them because even if I just stick to the looping SMT and Persona characters, there just isn't enough space with the new tag limit.

- Inspired by Shin Megami Tensei / Persona Infinite Loops by multiple authors

Welcome to the Infinite Loops!

Hello, and welcome to the Shin Megami Tensei / Persona Infinite Loops!

This is the revised edition of the original compilation, due to loss of notes. Last updated: August 23th, 2023. This section will be update upon further developments.

If you don't know what the loops are, here is a quick introduction:

Originally started by the author **Innortal** in this very website, the **Infinite Loops Project** is a complication of snapshots involving characters from various franchises, reliving their lives over and over and over again – and getting into various shenanigans in an attempt to alleviate their boredom. Eventually, **SpaceBattles** (the website) got its hands on it, and now the Infinite Loops is a truly *massive* community project with countless authors, involving just about every fandom you can think of.

And the Megami Tensei franchise – or as it is known in the Loops, the **Amala** branch – is no exception.

Now, an introduction of the official loop mechanics, paraphrased to be as current as possible (original rules set by author **Saphroneth**):

One person per loop, often the main character, is an **Anchor**. They are the person who first starts time looping. There may be more anchors per loops for a variety of reasons.

There is at least one Anchor present in any Time Loop snippet, though it may not be the local one.

The standard pattern for a loop is that the Anchor (and whoever else is looping there) come to awareness in a loop at a particular point in the story. From there, events will play out as influence by the Loopers present, acting with the benefit of their foreknowledge, until a predetermined end point is reached or all Loopers have copped it.

To be **Awake** is to be aware of the time loops (that is, to have gone back in time *this* time). NOTE: Awake applies *only to Loopers* – those who know that there's a time loop but are not loopers are called "**Loop Aware**".

The Anchor is the only character guaranteed to be Awake. Even after other have started looping, it is mostly random as to whether they will be Awake this particular loop.

Crossovers, fusions, and alternate pasts can also take place. It is perfectly possible, for example, to have the characters Awaken into a loop which conforms to a fanfic universe rather than reality, or to Awaken to find that someone from a different Loop has replaced their friends.

Loops do not have to be in a chronological order, but it is strongly preferred that they do not require a mutually contradictory order.

Just about every looper is very, *very* stir crazy.

Background:

Time loops happened because something went horribly wrong with **Yggdrasil**, the supercomputer that runs the multiverse, and the **Admins** running everything put a great deal of universes into time Loops to stop them from breaking any further.

Backups do exist though: in many worlds, other Loops are stored as works of fiction, just in case the Admins need to restore the factory settings of a Branch. Our world, the Hub, is the master backup, and contains every backup of every loop known to exist.

And as you should expect, Amala is the (second) most damaged up branch in the multiverse (No. 1 is the Mega Man branch, for those curious).

Whatever broke Yggdrasil caused the cosmic flaw that made the MegaTen universe – Amala – as messed up as it is. It drove YHVH (the one present in the branch) absolutely mad, and even *warped the backups*, so that YHVH can be nothing *but* the tyrant we know from the games. Nocturne especially is one of the most damaged sub-branches in existence. Fortunately for them, the Persona sub-branch managed to escape most of the damage.

Branch info:

Admin: Taira no Masakado

Shin Megami Tensei I (known as "**Mainline**" branch)
Anchor: Steven
Loopers: Futsuo (protagonist), Aoi (female hero)

Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne (known as "**Conception**" branch)
Anchor: Naoki Kashima (Demi-Fiend)
Loopers: Pixie (also known as Super-Pixie), Hee-Ho, the Rider Fiends

Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey (the "**Schwarzwelt**" branch)
Anchor: Langdon Alder (protagonist)
Loopers: Arthur

Shin Megami Tensei IV and **APOCALYPSE** (the "**Firmament**" branch)
Anchor: Isabeau
Loopers: Flynn, Burroughs

Digital Devil Saga (the "**Junkyard**" branch)
Anchor: Sera (soul-bonded with Serph), Seraph (when the two fuse together)
Loopers: Serph, Heat, Argilla, Gale, Cielo, Roland

Devil Survivor 1 (the "**Lockdown**" branch)
Anchor: Atsuro Kihara
Loopers: Kazuya Minegishi "Abel", all the "Bel" demons (soul-bonded with Abel), Yuzu Tanikawa

Devil Survivor 2
Anchor: Al Saiduq
Loopers: Hibiki Kuze, Daichi Shijima, Io Nitta, Yamato Hotsuin

Devil Summoner – Raidou Kuzunoha games
Anchor: unconfirmed – Stealth Anchor
Loopers: Raidou Kuzunoha XIV, Gotou

Persona:

Anchor: Igor
P1: Naoya Todou, Maki Sonomura, Kei Nanjo, Masao "Mark" Inaba, Reiji Kido, Yukino Mayuzumi, Yuka Ayase, Eriko "Elly" Kirishima, Hidehiko "Brown" Uesugi
P2: Tatsuya Suou, Maya Amano, Eikichi Michina, Lisa Silverman, Jun Kurosu, Katsuya Suou, Ulala Serizawa, Baofu
P3: Minato Arisato / Makoto Yuki, Yukari Takeba, Junpei Iori, Mitsuru Kirijo, Akihiko Sanada, Shinjiro Aragaki, Fuuka Yamagishi, Koromaru, Aegis, Ken Amada, Ryoji Mochizuki (soul-bonded to Minato Arisato), Chidori Yoshino, Elizabeth, Theodore
P4: Yu Narukami, Yosuke Hanamura, Chie Satonaka, Yukiko Amagi, Kanji Tatsumi, Rise Kujikawa, Teddie, Naoto Shirogane, Nanako Dojima, Ryotaro Dojima, Tohru Adachi, Margaret
PQ: Rei (soul-bonded with Zen)
P5: Akira Kurusu "Joker", Morgana, Ryuji Sakamoto, Ann Takamaki, Yusuke Kitagawa, Makoto Nijima, Futaba Sakura, Haru Okumura, Sojiro Sakura, Zenkichi Hasegawa, Goro Akechi, Lavenza, Sophia, Sumire Yoshizawa

Loop Aware Entities: Lucifer, the Fiends, the White, Philemon, Nyarlathotep, Zen

Dreaming: Takahisa Kandori

Additional branch-specific notes:
Naoki Kashima is an MLE for some loops
After the Edit, Naoki Kashima is now a Travelling Looper
Law and Chaos heroes in general cannot loop. Same goes for the humans in the Vortex World.
Reiji Kido, Tatsuya Suou and Jun Kurosu have been Grima Patched to prevent Nyarlathotep from looping.
The Rumour Curse and the Atma virus are under Read Only.
Aleph is currently not looping for several reasons.
If SMT If… ever loops, Igor is anchoring it.
When in an "Eternal Punishment" loop, Eikichi, Jun and Lisa cannot be all Awake simultaneously.

Other important terms:
Baseline: The official canon story. Technically these fics are all sequels.
Variant: One or more elements of the Baseline have been changed.
Fused Loop: Crossovers.
Ping: A signal that loopers can use to alert other loopers that they are Awake. The Ping has to be taught to other loopers, and only those who know how to use it can detect it.
Subspace Pocket: A pocket dimension that allows loopers to store objects and carry them across loops. Technically, it's a means to sap them of their excess power so they don't grow TOO overpowered, but that drain is negligent, especially compared to the utility. They start small but grow larger as the looper grows stronger, with no known upper limits.
MLE (Malicious Looping Entity): A Looper whose actions are harmful towards the stability of their Branch and Yggdrasil in general.
Loop-Aware: A non-looping character who knows that the time loops exist.
Dreaming: A character who (usually literally) Dreams about previous loops without being a looper themselves.
Cluster: A collection of closely-associated Baselines. Amala is one. (for other examples, think Nasuverse or all the Mario stuff).
Read-Only: An ability or object that can only be obtained for the duration of the loop they're in, and cannot be carried over subsequent loops.
Eiken: The punishment loop, reserved for loopers who threaten the stability of a loop. Ran by Aphrodite and usually follows rule 63 and all the cringe anime harem high school clichés you can possibly imagine.
Grima Patch: In case a looper is connected metaphysically with a non-looping evil being, the Grima Patch can be used to prevent that evil being from looping.
Chrysalis Syndrome: Named after Chrysalis from My Little Pony. A looper who first Awakens in a variant treats the variant as a their baseline. This can alter their personality.
Sakura Syndrome: Named after Sakura from Naruto. This looper is convinced that their actions have absolutely no consequences due to the time loops, leading to unhinged and immoral behavior with no regard to other people.
Setsuna Syndrome: Named after Setsuna from Sailor Moon. This looper is convinced that the loops MUST play out exactly as in baseline, even though that's technically impossible due to variants and fused loops.
DLID (Dissociative Loop Identity Disorder): If a character has two or more baselines (appears in multiple media of a Cluster), then they are often confused over what their "true" baseline is.
Null Loop: A loop where nobody has access to their out-of-loop power and Pockets.

Compilation notes: Each snip will be marked at the beginning with the following information in bold:
Fandoms: listed as **[fandom a], [fandom b]**
Title: if there isn't one, it will be marked (no title)
Author(s): if author is unknown, it will be marked as (unknown). If the author has an fanfiction or AO3 account, both usernames will be used in the following format: fanfiction username (sb username)
Canon status: all snips are considered canon unless noted otherwise.

Mini line brakes – as in, those used in individual snips, in chapters where multiple are posted – will be marked as following: **…**

Now, please enjoy the world of the Amala branch of the Infinite Loops!

Miscellaneous part 1

[Persona 2], [Persona 3], [Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Leonite

Igor looked over. His master wass talking withtthe one named Tatsuya again. At first he had passed it off as a coincidence that a guest of the velvet room seemed to be visiting again, but Tatsuya was different. He was more memorable than the boy with the earring had been. This meant that either they had been reduced in age are forced to fight again or that time was repeating itself.

Regardless of the result, he had a job to do as the proprietor of the Velvet Room. Perhaps though, he should have some fun with it.

…

Minato grabbed onto the doorway as he stumbled into a strange blue room. A room that seemed almost like a rising elevator... and in the center, an elevator assistant in blue with white hair and yellow eyes... and a man in a black suit, extremely wide eyes, and a massive nose... and for some reason a sombrero.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room."

…

Maya sighed as she entered the Velvet Room. Philemon had told her that his servant would be here, to help summon and fuse new persona. As she enters, the first thing she notices is the man, with a long nose, white balding hair.... and what looked like an orange gi straight out of Dragon ball, six orange dots on his scalp. The only thing that really takes away from the appearance aside from the nose is those extremely wide eyes.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room."

…

Yu looked around. He seemed to be travelling in a blue limousine, travelling through fog. To his right, a woman in a black suit with grey hair and yellow eyes... although the suit seemed a bit short for her. In front of him, a balding man with a long nose, wide eyes, a bald head.... and wearing a blue dress that probably fitted better on the woman who shuffled about uncomfortably.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room."

[Persona], [Eiken]
(no title)

Author: Dalxein

Maya stopped as soon as she set foot in the Velvet Room.

If it could still be called that.

The walls were difficult to look at, the jarring patches of color her eyes told her were there, but her brain couldn't properly interpret beyond that they were the neon version of whatever their base was. The only part of the room she could focus on lay directly in front of her. An empty chair, a muddy rust brown, was sorely out of place in front of the Technicolor swirl of a table in front of it. Behind that was her Anchor, his long fingers steepled in front of a grin far too manically happy even for him. He was clad in a pomp and froof men's suit in patched colors she could recognize as hot pink and lime green. The poofy frock shirt under his suit jacket was a gossamer haze of violet, and atop his head sat a tiny red and gold fez that appeared reminiscent of a cupcake.

The worst part was his eyes. Within his eyes were tiny swirls of madness and glee that slowly ate away at her willpowe-

She tore her eyes away from his, and they landed on his assistant from one of the other loops. Elizabeth was clad in what could only be described as what she would logically end up with if she were to puree a sad clown, take a cup of the mush and mix it with one part each of half a dozen colors that were somehow both neon and pastel simultaneously, and shake the lot of it exactly three times before taking a swig of it which didn't seem to sit well with her stomach and as such was vomited all over the floor, left to dry and was then made into a dress. Her hat was oddly normal, though. In her hands was an obscenely large red and lime green lollipop.

A glance behind her told her that the door was already gone, so onward she tread. Slowly, as she walked forward, musical voices began to seep into her range of hearing. '*Welcome to the Velvet Room*' they melodiously and repeatedly cheered.

As she neared the table, other lines began to enter the song, but she could only piece out a few of the words.
'Your true self' 'the sea of your soul' 'one with eternity' 'join us and play' 'persona, the anima' 'the real you'…

She was standing behind the chair, now.

Her host's eyes panned up to meet hers.

"Welcome, to the Velvet Roo-"

Reality flashed in fifteen different dimensions of wrong before it ceased to exist.

…

He Awoke sitting behind his table, a large note impaled upon his long nose. He plucked it from his proboscis and held it forward to read.

‘*Your ability to utilize the Velvet Room’s dreamscape capacity to replicate items from other loops has been revoked until further notice.*

What part of ‘Skaia Bad’ failed to pierce that half-waxed chrome-top you call a skull?

-Skuld, head debugger.’

He would be without several of his most potent abilities for a while, then.

Unfortunate, that. Perhaps his latest prank was in poor taste and a bit out of hand…

This was odd, though. He couldn’t feel his bonds to his contracted guests, nor any bond with his master or assistants… Apparently he was very alone this loop. Well then, time to find out what hand he’d been dealt this time.

He slowly strode to the door leading out of the room, which oddly enough led him into a hallway stretching off to either side. But… that was strange. What sort of loop with a high school wouldn’t include a guest? Even one that’s not awake?

His eyes widened as he realized just how weak his sensory abilities were here, and subsequently his other abilities as well. With more agility than his old and thin frame suggested, he leapt backward in a spin to claw at where the handle to the Velvet Room’s door had previously been.

But to no avail. He was trapped here. The source of his guests’ worst horror stories.

“NOOOOOOOOOOO-“

…

Author: Farsan

"We must perform an Intervention," Maya said. "We must find a way to get Igor out of that musty Room and make him interact with the real world more, or these pranks of him will grow even more out of control."

"Any ideas?"

…

Author: Leonite

"Maybe we could convince Philemon to punish him, kick him out of the Velvet Room? Can't imagine he's all that pleased." Tatsuya noted.

"This is assuming he knows." Aigis responded.

"But at the same time it does give us a way to get him out of the room... but not like that." Naoya noted.... he glanced at Yu, who had started smirking. "And something tells me you have an idea Mr. Sisterhood Complex of Steel." A blade swing downwards from Izanagi no

Ookami was barely blocked by Amon Ra. Yu hadn't even glanced over at Naoya as it happened. "Alright, alright, you're touchy about the nickname."

"Stupid nicknames aside... I have a great solution." Yu noted. "We get Igor... to social link.

Get Philemon to have him replace me or Minato, no powers, no nothing, just the power of the Wild Card and the Fool.. and force him to go through the entire year social linking."

"So... forcibly make him realize what humanities limits are by making him human?" Aigis pointed out. "It's a possibility. Or perhaps give his powers to Margret and have him only get them back if he can Social Link with one of us successfully." It went unsaid that Elizabeth wasn't a choice for the powers.

Maya nodded. "Either way it's an effective option... Naoya, you meet Philemon first, can you try to organize it with him?"

"I'll look into it. He should probably be able to tell about the whole looping thing anyway."

...

Author: Farsan

My dearest and most faithful servant Igor:

You know that I value your diligence and that I trust you completely... but you simply must stop reclusing yourself in that dusty old room!

My dear Igor, there is more to a young spirit's existence than fulfilling your function, so I'm sending you to supervise directly the events that will happen at St. Hermelin's high school, posing as the History teacher. You should use this opportunity to learn about humanity and its culture. And, I have an even more essential task for you to complete: Make some friends!

[Persona 4], [Naruto]
(no title)
Author: Leonite

Sometimes loops could have interesting variants. Sometimes loops could give new people for you to meet.

Naruto sighed. "I hate playing the supporting role sometimes," He muttered. He and Yu stepped into the Liquor Store. "I mean... we both know she's probably dead."

And sometimes Yu ended up playing host to an utterly bored first generation Looper like Naruto. It always amazed him how someone could be so blaise about the pain they're supposed to feel in their role. "Just be careful. A Shadow will confront you with the truths that you don't want to hear." Yu said... but something seemed off. Teddie was with them, that wasn't it. Sakura had replaced Chie, so he was not looking forward to fighting what would most likely be Mara... but Saki's voice hadn't echoed out at all. And then a dark, distorted chuckling sounded out as both Yu and Naruto turned. A yellow eyed Naruto, dressed in

Naruto's standard outfit rather than the school uniform he was wearing right now, stood before them.

"Yeah she's totally dead, and who cares?" Shadow Naruto said.

"T-Two Naruto's?" Teddie asked. Usually Yu would have replied with a snarky comment... but something about this Shadow seemed more off than usual. Aside from anything else, he hadn't had a fused loop where the first generation was part of his team.

"After all, I shouldn't care at all. I'm immortal, I'm above their stupid laws, morals and decency." Shadow Naruto continued.

Naruto snorted. "Please, I get an earful of this from Dark Naruto, you aren't revealing anything new." He insisted.

Shadow Naruto's eyes narrowed. "Of course, I fail to realize that in the process I've been more depraved than Sakura ever was." Naruto winced. "I've killed more people in one loop than Madara or Obito could hope to with the Moon's Eye Plan, all in the name of fun." Naruto growled a little at this point, his fists balled up. "And I've never regretted it."

"Shut up!" Naruto yelled "That's not true."

"Of course it is!" Shadow Naruto said, a big grin on his face. "I am you after all. All these dark secrets, these simple loops, all these times torturing Kakashi-Sensei even when it went too far, watching as Konoha burned. I enjoyed it. You enjoyed it -tebbayo." The grin shrunk down to just a simple smirk. "The villagers were right. I'm a monster, worse than they think the Kyuubi is!"

"Don't you dare say that!" Naruto growled out. His eyes were red, and slitted, clearly angry enough to call on Kurama's power.

"Naruto don't!" Yu yelled out.

"Why shouldn't I?" Shadow Naruto shouted back at his counterpart.

"You don't have any right to! You can't understand what it's like because you're not me!" Naruto clasped a hand over his mouth in shock, but by then the damage was done. Shadow Naruto chuckled... and then started to fully laugh.

"Not anymore I'm not! I can't believe you were that stupid!" the Shadow declared, turning into liquid as hundreds of shadows gathered to him... too many, he's growing too fast!

"Outside, now!" Yu shouted. Him and Teddie ran as Naruto shaked his head before he followed them out, the haunted Liquor Store crumbling around them As the three emerged, a tremendous roar bellowed out as a tremendous beast emerged. It looked like Kurama with all nine tails, but as if he had been skinned, a person chained to each of the tails, letting out an unholy wail as they did. Half or a stretched out orange spiral mask covers the shadow's face, it's other revealed eye showing the cris-cross of Sage Mode and Kurama's Chakra. It was

surrounded in a hazy shroud of red chakra, skin constantly regenerating, only to be eaten away, the claws slick with blood.

"**I am the Shadow. The true self,**" Shadow Naruto rumbled out. "**I am one of the first, the greatest of them. They should all bow down and do what I want to do, for I am a god to them. I will kill you to make sure I can me!**" Yu gripped his sword and looked at Naruto... who trembled, gripping his stomach in pain. The Shadow was formed from the emotions of a first generation looper, and that looper could barely stand. Yu grunted as a card spun in his hand, this would be a rough fight.

…

Sakura stared down at the rope. The useless rope that had been severed by the portal into the TV world. "Damn it, a new realm filled with the manifestations of the human mind? That's pay dirt... and I'm missing it." She grumbled.Still, she just gazed at the TV... and then stumbled back. She could sense a tremendous power, an extremely powerful killing intent. It was like the time that she had experimented on the Hyuuga to see if they could awaken the Rinnegan... without letting Sasuke or Naruto know about it.

...

"Look it's not that bad alright!"

"Sakura... look at them. Neji can barely move, he looks more like a tree than anything else... and he's one of the lucky ones. I think Naruto is still looking for Hinata's ashes... there's nothing else left of her."

"Big deal, they won't remember it Sasuke. It's all in the name of glorious science!"

"You're no better than baseline Orochimaru!"

"At least I had some foundation for it! I had science backing me up, what he did butchered it. Don't you dare... Naruto... what are you doing?"

"..."

"Naruto?"

"Demonic Sage Art: Giant Galactic Rasenshuriken."

…

Sakura blinked as she tore herself away from the memory. All that was left in it was the sound of a shrieking bell before she awoke in Equestria, already on the moon. Naruto had avoided her since then and she couldn't blame him for it. She had tried her best to make it up to him, but when you are an immortal time may not heal certain wounds. But this presence... it felt the same, but twisted. Warped. "Naruto's gotten himself in trouble... he's gotten in trouble inside a world of shadows." She gazed at the TV. "Damn it... I don't want him to die this quickly. He isn't a ninja this time. He hasn't even been able to use Kurama." And while

the other guy was one of the locals... she doubted even now that she could fight Naruto on her own when he was going that far.

She saw a glint of blue out of the corner of her eye... and then stared at her reflection in the TV. The reflection had changed. Unlike Sakura, who was dressed in her school uniform and a red jacket, she was dressed in her ninja garb. Sakura glanced around... it can't be a genjutsu. There's no chakra here, and no-one seems to be nearby. "Oh yes, boo hoo, Naruto shouldn't die, he's ruining my fun!" The copy in the TV mocked. "Who cares about his morals anyway? He shouldn't care about these things,, my experiments are fun!" Sakura stared at her doppleganger even as Shadow Sakura continued. "These loops are madness anyway, why is Naruto concerned if I'm a bit mad? That bitch wasn't even looping at the time!" The voice came out distorted. "All the boys and girls in the multiverse are mine to play with."

"Yeah, so?"

Shadow Sakura blinked. Sakura had clenched her fists at this point and glared at the shadow. "The point is that I'm a psychopath. A sociopath." Shadow Sakura insisted. "Sex and science are fun, it;s the only way to do things!"

"And?"

Shadow Sakura stumbled at that. "W-well it means that I'm a monster to them all. Worse than Orochimaru ever was in any loop! Naruto will never forgive me even if Sasuke does!"

Sakura glared at her shadow counterpart... before she let out a sigh. "Yeah. You're probably right about that." She admitted.

"...what?"

"I couldn't handle the loops... so I went off the deep end. I went so far trying to find a way to cope, I went crazy... I think I'm still crazy." Sakura said as her eyes started to water. "I only have two or three consistent friends in the world and I've hurt them. All in the name of my own pleasure."

The Shadow growled. "That's not what you're supposed to do bitch! You should be denying me!" It yelled... she seemed to be losing her composure.

"Why should I? We both know it's true." Sakura said. "Sasuke has done terrible things himself, but Naruto hasn't. He finds ways to make sure he never needs to be the monster that he's been called, not unless we all agree. He might never forgive me... but that won't stop me trying. It's who I am."

Shadow Sakura opened her mouth as if preparing to let out a roar.... and then closed it with a soft smile. "Yeah, I can't argue with that." She admitted... before dispersing into energy. A blue card floated out of the screen and into Sakura's hand. On one side a two toned mask was shown. On the othera large muscled woman, pin in colour and dressed in a red bodysuit. Her head is covered by a mask, half of it showing a calm looking version of her face, looking almost like Tsunade's does on the monument... and the other half is her in her mad scientist

moods, a maniacal grin plastered on. The mask is pink on the calm side, and white on the mad side.

Sakura smiled as she heard a voice echo around her. "You have obtained the facade, the mask one wears to make it through the hardships of life. The persona Mochizuki Chiyome. Now go. Save Naruto."

With a grin, an actual, genuine grin one her face, Sakura leapt into the TV.

...

Yu narrowly dodged a blast of air from the shadow kitsune, grimacing as he noticed that where he had just been standing was shredded to dust. He had expected a challenge going into this, and had called in a few favors with Igor as a result, but not to this extent... he reached out his hand, a blue card appearing in it, only to shatter like glass as he grasped it. "Loki!" As he declared this, a man in a white robe blonde hair, pointed ears and purple skin appeared and nodded to Yu. The Persona who emodied the maximized Fool Arcana, symbolized in the Investigation team, leapt into the air and started speedily flying around the mouth of the monsterous shadow and covering it in heavy ice. Yu glanced over at Naruto. He had at least expected Naruto to still be able to fight and help him out, but Naruto looked busy enough as his seal glowed violently. Yu could only wince as the shadow opened its jaw wide, snapping the ice off like it was nothing.

"You cannot stop me. I will still from the other me the power of the demon he holds in, and I will take his place." Shadow Naruto rumbled out.

Naruto just glared at his counterpart. "Oh shut up already, you sound more cliched than Obito does!" He snapped.

Shadow Naruto snarled and swiped at Naruto with a claw... only for Naruto to leap into the air, narrowly dodging it. Yu felt glad that Teddie had seen it wise to flee the field before the fight, but this wasn't getting anywhere. Loki was surrounded in blue energy as Yu reached out a hand to him, before it shattered again as Yu grasped the air. "Isis!" A dark skinned winged woman embodying the Empress Arcana and Margret took Loki's place. She flew above Shadow Naruto as energy gathered on her... and then she let out a massive blast of green wind energy, powerful enough to tear people apart... and it had no effect on him.

"Seriously? Either of me will tell you, the wind is MY specialty!" Shadow Naruto stated, sending out another blast at Yu. Isis swooped down, pulling the silver haired teen out of the blast, although when you looked at her there were hundreds of small scratches on her back, she seemed to be leaking energy before shattering away. Damn it, he had specifically fused Isis to inherit wind skills purely because he lacked them. "You're more pathetic than he is! I've changed my mind, you're going to be sacrificed for my amusement-"

"CHERRY BLOSSOM HAND!"

A massive pink fist slammed into the back of the kitsune shadow. Before it could manage to regain it's footing Sakura, her arm glowing with spiritual energy, and Mochizuki Chiyome slammed their fists into its back as well. Shadow Naruto collapsed onto the ground as they

did. Naruto and Yu gaped at the scene before Sakura yelled out. "Oi guys, are we going to waste this chance?" The two glanced at each other and grinned, even as Yu pulled out his sword and Naruto a kunai, the three rushed at him, heavy blade swings, fist swings and such landing into the shadow's body.

"No... I won't let this happen." The shadow roared. with a blast of energy the three were sent flying back a few feet, but stayed on them. "I refuse to be humiliated like one of the other me's prank-"

"Mada!"

"-victims" Shadow Naruto managed to say before a gigantic purple and black four armed flaming Persona landed on its back and knocked it to the ground again. Yu smirked as he still felt his bond with Yosuke strong even across dimensions. Said bond had become the Magician Social Link... with Mada at the end of it. "No... this isn't..."

Yu sighed. "Face it. You claim that you're better than the real you, but you sound like a cliched villain half the time." Yu commented.

"SHUT UP!" Shadow Naruto roared. More energy blasted off of him, sending Yu and Sakura flying this time, along with their persona. The shadow stood up as each of the bodies chained to it's tail (one of which, Yu noted, looked a lot like Sakura) opened their mouths as if in a silent scream. White energy filled them as similar energy. "I'll show you... Kyuubi Shadow Blast." As it spoke those last word, the nine points of white energy fired out, as did the main blast, as beams, the nine rapidly wrapping themselves around the main blast. Even as Mada raised it's hands and firing out four blasts of fire with Mochizuki ruching forward for another spiritual punch... the blast tore through them like it was nothing. Sakura's persona was consumed in the glow and power of the energy blast, even as Mada stood in front of it. The glow momentarily blinded the group... and then Sakura collapsed to her knees.

Mochizuki Chiyome laid on the ground. Pieces of spiritual energy, almost like data really, flickered about her. She had been lucky though. Mada's legs still stood for the moment, but the entire upper half had been obliterated. Soon the lower half simply evaporated into energy. Yu barely held himself up as he held onto the wreckage of the TV world Liquor Store. "Damn it." He muttered, even as Sakura gripped her fists and pulled herself up slowly, her Persona doing the same. A blast like that... of course Naruto would be the one to be able to surpass all of the regular Shadow selves.

Shadow Naruto laughed, a deep bubbling laugh. "Do you see now how pointless it is?" He asked. "When compared to someone as strong as I am you can never win. I will always rule supreme as the strongest Shadow and the strongest looper!" He declared as white energy started gathering again.

"Oh just shut up!" Yu and Sakura glanced over as Naruto leaped at his Shadow... an immense blue sphere in his hands and black slits on yellow eyes. "Sage Art: Giant Rasengan!" The ball exploded outward and sent Shadow Naruto into another one of the buildings, crushing it.

Sakura sighed as Mochizuki pulled herself up. "Ok Naruto, how are you in Sage Mode, and what took you so long?" She asked. Yu raised an eyebrow... he'd have thought the first

question to be "How are you using Chakra?"

Naruto simply grinned. "This place reflects the human world... so I ended up figuring out that meant it would copy the natural energy too." He said. Whatever Sakura's retort would be was cut off as they saw Shadow Naruto start to pull itself up. "Shall we finish this then?"

"Yeah, this other you is getting really annoying," Sakura noted.

Yu simply smiled even as he reached out. "Then lets stop messing around. Izanagi no Ookami," He stated, crushing another card as a the masked persona in white with it's immense spear appeared.

Naruto grinned as he saw it. He held out a hand, a swirling Rasengan gathering in it. "Lets take him!"

"Yeah!" Sakura shouted. She looked around as if trying to find him... and she probably was, Yu noted. She lacked Teddie's special glasses.

Yu glared at the shadow. "Follow my signal Sakura. ZIODYNE!" He declared, a powerful blast of lighting striking out an instant and pushed it's way through Shadow Naruto, who roared in pain. "One!"

Sakura grinned and leaped towards the blast, her persona in tandem with her. Both arms were cocked back, aglow with blue energy. "Cherry Blossom Crash!" Sakura announced as the two super strong fists slammed into Shadow Naruto's face and caused it to slam into the building behind it. "Two!"

Naruto held out the orb towards Yu. "Hey, it's your loop... how about we finish this battle together?" He asked. Yu looked at Naruto and saw whatever darkness that had troubled him before gone... and smiled. He held out his hand and pushed energy into the orb... as did Izanagi no Ookami. The Rasengan started to spark and grow, taken on a sharp point at the top as they ran towards Naruto's Shadow.

It looked down and roared. "No!" As it swung a claw down, the attack deflected by Izanagi's blade. This leaft the two to rush at the belly of the beast.

"Take this! Rasenspear!" Naruto shouted as they slammed the pointed orb forward. The orb spun faster and faster as they did... and then it expanded, as if the spear made for a giant out of pure electrical energy had been pushed through Shadow Naruto, electricity arcing up and down it's body, each of the corpse like bodies exploding as the electricity ran down into the nine tails, turning into black ichor as Shadow Naruto roared out. Such was the force that Yu and Naruto were blasted back... only to be caught by Izanagi no Ookami. the two smiled as they glanced at the scene. Shadow Naruto raised a claw, as if attempting to get up once more... and then slumped as the big body turned into black ichor, pooling down at the bottom of the building and took the form of Naruto once more.

"Hey." Naruto stepped forward slowly. He panted... that obviously had taken more out of him than he'd like to admit. Shadow Naruto looked up at him. "I kinda get it now. There's always that temptation in me to abuse my power, to do things that no regular person should even

think of doing. The part of me that doesn't mind if Konoha burns during one loop, that decided I was so bored with sex I'd try to go without sex. The part that terrifies anyone who doesn't loop... and some of those who do." Naruto held out his hand. "The part of me I don't like to be. But you're still me, and if I don't admit it... then I'll become bitter and fall into an obsession with the past like Obito.

Shadow Naruto let a small grin cross his face. "Yeah... try to tone down the power next time though. Who'd think that such a young looper can give it so much strength?" He pointed out as he turned into blue light... and with a flash, a kitsune appeared above Naruto's head, much like the shadow, but with the orange fur of the Kyuubi no Kitsune. Each of the bodies had been replaced, each tail ending in a mask.

"Thou art I... and I'm diverting from the script," The persona growled out.

Naruto facefaulted. "Of course... as soon as I get something cool, it ends up being your new body doesn't it Kurama?" He asked.

Kurama just grinned. "Technically I'm the persona Kyuubi no Kitsune," He remarked as Naruto let out an anguished yell. Sakura smiled at the scene... before she walked over to Yu.

"Hey... thanks for letting him go through this," Sakura noted. "Naruto's been needing some help for a while... and there aren't many psychologists that help like this."

Yu simply smiled back. "It was my pleasure... maybe there's something to be said for it as a treatment for loopers too."

Time suddenly froze around Yu. This wasn't a new sensation, but he hadn't expected it... had he formed a social link with Naruto and Sakura?

THOU ART I AND I AM THOU. THOU HAST GAINED NEW BONDS THAT SHALL LAST BEYOND TIME AND SPACE. THOU SHALT BE FURTHER BLESSED WHEN F+FORMING PERSONA OF THE MAGICIAN AND CHARIOT ARCANA.

Well that explained it... but Yu looked around. Time hadn't returned to normal. A second voice spoke up, as if added as an afterthought.

Thou shalt also be able to summon the persona Inari. Good deeds get rewarded.

Yu resisted the urge to facepalm... of course. He essentially had a direct message line to the admins like this.

"So guys... where are we?" Sakura asked as time flowed forward again, still without the special glasses.

…

Igor shuffled the tarot card even as he heard the door being opened. "Ah, Mr. Narukami... welcome back," He stated.

Yu smiled. "I have to admit, you saved us today," Yu casually noted. Margret wasn't in the Velvet Room, as Igor had suspected that Yu would be coming in.

"Why whatever do you mean my boy?" Igor asked even as his grin remained on his face.

Yu just let his own smile match as best he could. "You don't have to hide it. Sakura just so happens to face her shadow when we needed help most?" He asked. "And she has access to God Hand right away? It's not hard to connect the dots Igor."

Igor, if anything, grinned wider. "You had a marvelous idea for Mr. Uzumaki... so I simply felt that perhaps Ms. Hanuro could do with the same treatment. The timing was simply a coincidence."

"Well coincidentally, I owe you."

Igor shook his head. "Let us just consider it paid for... after all, you and I both know it's not often I get to spend time with such marvelous and interesting guests," He insisted. Yu just smiled as he stood up and walked out of the Velvet Room. Igor then pulled a piece of paper he had hidden under his shoe.

You haven't gotten back on our good side... but it's a good step.

-Skuld

Igor just shuffled the cards as he let his smile become a genuine, happy smile... the size of which is not for mortals to see.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [HeartCatch PreCure!]
(no title)
Author: jxz

Tsubomi Hanazaki couldn't believe it.

She was losing.

Since she began looping, she had gotten stronger, even reaching the levels of the Legendary Cure Ange.

And now, she couldn't access all that power, only a fracion of if, and only to dodge the attacks of the Desertrian.

It looked like he Apostles discovered how to make the Cures unable to transform. Tsubomi tried a lot of transformations, from Goku Uniforms, to other Cure artifacts. She even tried using the CQC Space Enchancer she gained when she replaced that Nyarlatothepian. Not even one worked.

Tsubomi saw her friends. They weren't awake, and as such, they were trashed by the monster. Dodging more attacks, she though on ways to purify the Desertrian.

"I can't use my ID, and if I use any of the techniques Ranma taught me, I'm risking the Heart Flower..."

She thought too much, and forgot to pay attention to the battlefield. That prover fatal, as the Deserrian caught her in his arms, and tossed her to a wall.

The hit was really powerful, but Tsubomi managed to stay awake. However, she was too tired to coninue dodging the attacks. Closing her eyes, she wished that next loop would be easier...

When she opened them, she was still in the wall, while the Desertrian was paralized by... velvet-colored chains?

"Hey! Do you need help?" She heard someone shout. weakly, she turned to see the person who had shouted...

It was a blue-haired girl, with male-like clothes. At her side, a blonde girl, who looked like a robot. And at her other side, a white-haired woman, with blue clothes that resembled the ones used by flight attendants.

"Y-yeah..." Tsubomi answered. "But be careful... don't destroy the Heart Flower..."

"Heart Flower? What's that?" the white-haired woman asked.

"Searhing on Hub Database... Heart Flower. One of the many objects that shows the dreams and hopes of a person in the Pretty Cure Loop." the blonde girl said.

The blue-haired girl pondered "Then using Megidolaons or Almighty spells is out of the question." Whatever she had said, it seemed that didn't make the white-haired woman happy.

"But we could use Piercing attacks, can't we?" the blonde said.

"Maybe... let's give it a try." The blue-haired said, and retrieved a gun fron her Subspace Pocket, as two blue-glowing cards appeared in front of her and the white-haired woman. Meanwhile, the blonde girl set herself in a position.

She knew now who they were... And smiled when she heard the shout the three gave.

"PERSONA!"

[Persona 4], [Fullmetal Alchemist], [Trigun], [Blue Exorcist], [JoJo's Bizarre Adventure – Diamond is Unbreakable]
Revenge Is A Dish Best Served With Awesome
Author: GioGio

Tohru Adachi backed up, coughing and bleeding from multiple bullet wounds, blunt force trauma, and that magical crap the Personas produce.

He had entered the TV after those Investigation Brats finally figured out his game. He had intended to lure them in, extend his fun for just a bit, before killing them all. Then, the fog

would go down on Inaba and turn everyone into Shadows. Finally ending Adachi's boredom with living in the shithole town.

Unfortunately, those other dumbasses that Namatame kidnapped and threw into the TV were more of a problem than he had thought.

"Where do you think you're going!?!" Edward Elric yelled as he slammed his hands onto the ground, creating a stone hand that slapped Adachi towards his feet. "We ain't done with you yet!"

"You brat..." Adachi groaned out in pain. "Didn't your mom tell you to respect police officers?"

"You don't deserve to be a policeman!" Alphonse yelled out in anger while the rest of the IT nodded in agreement.

"All you are is a lame-ass thug!" Yosuke declared, making Yu smirk. Always count on Yosuke to say the awesome line while beating down Adachi.

Adachi growled in anger as he whipped out his gun...

Only for a gunshot to ring out before Adachi's gun flew out of his hand.

"I don't think its a good idea to point guns at children, friend." Vash the Stampede pointed out as he holstered his gun. Adachi was now panicking as the IT drew closer.

"I say we beat the crap out of him some more." Rin Okumura growled out as he began to unsheathe his sword, his tail swishing and blue flames coming off his body in anticipation. "Asshole deserves it for the crap he's done."

"But if we beat him up more, he could die." Chie pointed out, making Adachi nod frantically in agreement.

"Right! Besides, you wouldn't just keep on beating a heavily wounded guy who's surrendered right? It's unfair!"

"Oh really?" Josuke Higashikata asked before his Persona (Though he kept calling it a 'Stand'

Crazy Diamond appeared behind him. Adachi then noticed all his wounds closing and his energy returning to his body. "Okay then. The way I see it is this: If I heal you back up, *then* we beat the shit out of you, it would make this a fair fight." Josuke's eyes gained a dangerous glint that made Adachi almost wet himself. "Wouldn't it?"

"Yeah, your right." Yu said in agreement while he and the other members of the IT smirked as they then closed in on Adachi.

Adachi could only whimper out one thing before he got the most brutal ass-kicking in several universes.

"I hate this town..."

[Persona 4], [JoJo's Bizarre Adventure – Steel Ball Run]
Fast times in Inaba.
Author: GioGio

"Yes!" Gyro shouted out loud as he reeled back the fishing rod. As he did that, a humongous fish flew out from the water's surface. "Finally caught the bastard!"

"Holy crap!" Yosuke shouted behind the Italian as he pointed at the fish. "I-I think that's Shichiri's Guardian!"

"Well to me it was a massive pain in the ass to catch!" Gyro announced as he dragged the huge fish up onto the rock he was fishing. "Took me several Lo-a long time to catch the thing, but I finally did!"

"Wait, what was that thing before?" Chie asked curiously. "Lo-something?"

"Oh, it was nothing." Gyro said with a wave of his hand. He then grinned, showing his grills that had the phrase GO! GO! ZEPPELI! on them. "Anyway, lets start a fire! We're cooking' fish tonight! Nyohoho~!"

"I do hope you know that starting a fire on this beach is illegal Zeppeli-san." Naoto reminded, only for Hot Pants (Wearing a dark red one-piece bikini) to shake her head.

"Forget it Naoto. When Zeppeli sets his mind on something he'll follow through no matter how idiotic it is."

"Oh! I would bear-ry much like to eat fish-sticks!" Teddie shouted as he ran towards the group of three, waving his hands excitedly.

"Gyro seems to be getting along well with them." Yu said with a small smile on his face while he and Johnny sat on seats made out of sand. "Would have thought they would be trying to kill him for his... hobby."

"Ah, Gyro makes exceptions to certain places." Johnny said with a wave of his hand. "He actually likes Inaba. Says it's peaceful."

"That it is." Yu agreed with a nod of his head. "Too bad it can't stay this way."

Johnny frowned at the statement. In this loop, Funny Valentine was indeed the President of the United States. What made it even worse was that he was going to Japan in a month for 'diplomatic reasons'. But Johnny knew that the President would most likely make a stop at Inaba, his goal probably being to capture Izanami and use her power for the prosperity of America. Adachi may have been caught earlier (With Gyro giving him an extra beating for the crap he caused and tried to justify), but President Valentine was a wild card every Loop, with a different Stand and different powers.

"When he comes... we'll deal with him. Until then..." Johnny made a small intricate circle on his right armrest, clapped his hands, and put them down. In a flash of blue light, an arm made

of sand grew out from the armrest and went to the cooler several feet away, opened it, and reached in before throwing two sodas which Johnny caught. "...we enjoy the peace that we have." He then handed a soda to Yu, which he took and drank.

Another good thing about this Loop to Johnny was that several people from his baseline were here as well, albeit as teenagers. Still, it was nice to have them around and not be on a race where they were all ready to kill one another for the Corpse Parts.

"Sand Alchemy?" Yu asked, making Johnny shrug.

"Hey, me and Gyro ran into a lot of deserts in the Steel Ball Run, so I thought it would be useful. Besides, I can get sand from anywhere. It's just made of tiny eroded rocks after all. Gyro learned Steel Alchemy, which is a lot less practical than he thought when racing around the countryside."

"You know, you're a lot mellower than you are in the manga." Yu commented out loud, causing Johnny to freeze up.

"...Yeah, I guess I am." Johnny's smile turned melancholic as he looked towards Gyro lifting the Guardian over his head like a trophy. "Gyro may be weird, a pervert, a home wrecker, and someone who tells bad jokes all the time, but... he's my best friend. In one year, we were as close as brothers. That trip across America taught me that I didn't know as much about myself as I thought I did." Johnny let out a sigh. "Without him, I wouldn't have been able to walk. Figuratively, or literally."

Yu nodded in acceptance to Johnny's heartfelt declaration. "Guess we do need others to mature." He then looked back at the beach. He saw Gyro boasting about his catch to Yosuke, Chie, and Teddie while Naoto and Hot Pants looked on. Mountain Tim was trying to be suave to Rise and Yukiko, who giggled at his compliments and looked confused respectively. Kanji was racing across the beach against Sandman (Soundman? Johnny could never get what was the appropriate name to call him by), with the Native American way ahead of him.

"We have great friends, don't we?"

Johnny had a true, pleased, and fulfilled smile appear on his face as he looked at the scene.

"Yeah, we do."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Leonite

"In retrospect this seemed like a great idea at the time."

Yu glared and didn't relent even as he saw Makoto flinch. "You thought that convincing Ryoji to be like the moon from Majora's Mask was a good idea?" Yu questioned. Behind the two were ruins, the sunken ruins of what used to be Port Island... and the Moon barely stopped

from crashing into it. Not that there shouldn't be any other effects because of the moon, but at this point Yu had decided to just ignore the oddities and roll with it.

"Actually I was trying to convince him that video games could be the solution to if mankind survives or not." Makoto idly remarked as he pulled out some binoculars. "Besides, this might be the closest thing we're going to get to a fight between Izanami and Erebus." At the remark Yu glanced over at the top of the moon, pulling out his own binoculars as he did so. Indeed the red skeletal form of Izanami and the black mass that examplified Erebus flashed, Izanami seeming to keep her distance and favoring excessive amounts of lightning. "Besides, how'd you get here so fast?"

"That would be my doing." The two glanced behind them as Elizabeth spoke up, her own binoculars out. "Igor was quite insistent that we'd bring him along to make sure you didn't screw things up." She sings out cheerfully. "It is a splendid battle though."

Yu simply glared at Makoto. "If they end up blowing up the world and we end up in Eiken..."

"You'd need to line up." Makoto admitted. "Aigis is probably going to have my number first."

"... wait. Was this something you did because you don't loop as much?" Yu asked incredulously. He knew that Makoto (due to stability issues, last he heard) wasn't the one usually awake in his section, it was Aigis. Makoto's silence spoke for him more than any words could.

[Shin Megami Tensei I], [Persona]
(no title)
Author: Valentine Meikin

STEVEN looked at the hook-nosed man that had summoned him.

"I wish to discuss an exchange of information..." The man declared, "My name is Igor, and this is the Velvet Room..."

'MY NAME IS STEVEN. WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU DESIRE?' STEVEN replied.

"I will give you information on Personas, in exchange for access to your Demon Summoning Program..." Igor offered.

'THE EXCHANGE IS ACCEPTABLE, BUT I DO NOT WANT YOU GIVING THIS INFORMATION TO YOUR VISITORS,' STEVEN offered.

"Don't worry. My lips are sealed. It's just... One day, we might find ourselves handling the other's job..." Igor replied, and the two men shook hands before exchanging information on their respective methods for handling daemonic intrusions.

[Persona 4]
(no title)

Author: Valentine Meikin

Mariko sighed. Here she was, back in the Velvet Room, as the Skill Card vendor, which made no sense. She found a stereo she'd got from her new friends, putting on 'Shadow World' to listen to as Igor introduced Yu to the inner workings of the Velvet Room. She had got to 'Reach Out For The Truth' when he tugged on her arm and she pushed down her headphones.

"Oh, Sorry, I'm Mariko Kusumi, but you can call me Marie, I handle Skill Cards, and hope to possibly help you out in the future with your investigations," She stated, for Igor to frown at her.

"Mari...ko..." Igor asked, "May we talk after Mr. Narutaki leaves?"

Once Yu had disappeared, he shuffled the cards that were the physical rendition of the Persona arcanas, motioning for her to sit in the chair he'd most recently vacated.

"So, You've been here, in this moment, before, yes?" Igor asked, for her to nod, "We are in a form of time loop, my dear... I presume that in a previous instance, you discovered your true self?"

She slid the card depicting Kaguya over to Igor, who looked it over. "Ah, the Aeon arcana... Previously held by Aigis, another case like yourself..." He stated, before giving it her back, "Please understand this, Mariko... I am aware of anything that happens, an Anchor if you wish to use the term..."

He then leaned on his elbows, looking at her with one slightly oversized eye.

"The rules have changed, especially with you in the game..." He declared, "Well, You are also the complete form of Izanami..."

She nodded, and Igor motioned to her normal seat.

"Let us continue to watch the threads of fate... Who knows what will happen?" He finished, and the car continued its endless journey.

[Persona 4], [Kill la Kill]
(no title)
Author: TrueZero2

For Yu, it had been a fairly standard Loop, not many major changes.

Well, there *was* the fact that they had a guest this Loop. One Satsuki Kiryuin, who had looped into Chie’s place in the group. Surprisingly, despite the differences between the two of them personality-wise, Satsuki was friends with Yukiko.

Satsuki chalked it up to the Loop Memories. Apparently the two had grown up together, so they had become a rather unlikely pair of friends.

Of course, when it came to rescuing Yukiko from her Shadow’s castle…

…

“Yukiko! Where are you?” Satsuki shouted, having charged ahead. She’d left Yu, Teddie and Yosuke behind, charging into the castle. If only this fog wasn’t so goddamn thick, and then there was that chill in the air. “I’ve got to find her. We may only be friends because of what happened before I Awoke… but I…”

“Go on, Satsuki.” Someone else said, “‘But I’ what?”

“An enemy?” Satsuki said to herself, as she turned around.

She had come face to face with herself.

“Enemy? That all depends. Would you say that you’re one of your own worst enemies?” Her doppelganger asked, with a sickly sweet smile that frankly wouldn’t look out of place on Nui.

“What.”

“Oh, you didn’t know?” Satsuki’s double asked, her sweet smile turning into a sadistic grin. “Alright, I’ll fill you in. This world gives me a physical form, and I’m you, you see. All those little insecurities, fears, and regrets, I know them all! Boy, you’ve got some good ones…”

…

“Satsuki! You in… here?” Yosuke asked as the three guys caught up to Satsuki. “Hey partner, is she...?”

“Yes Yosuke, she’s sword-fighting with her Shadow.” Yu replied, equally confused. Satsuki had pulled Bakuzan out of her pocket, while Shadow Satsuki had changed looks slightly. She was now wearing Junketsu in the same way that Ryuko had worn it that one time in her baseline, and like Satsuki, she was using her own Bakuzan to fight.

“I didn’t think this was possible.” Teddie added, as the three of them stood there watching a rather intense duel unfolding between Satsuki and her Shadow-self.

…

It took a while, but the battle had ultimately come to an end, and Satsuki had triumphed over her Shadow.

“Heh, you may have beaten me, but I’m you.” Shadow Satsuki said, with a grin. “That means I can’t die so long as you live!”

“That’s right. You are me.” Satsuki replied.

“Huh?”

“You’re the side of me that I wish I could forget. You’re that version of me that I fear that I would have become had Ragyo been able to groom me the same way she had done with Nui.

A version of me that would have sacrificed humanity and done it all with a happy-go-lucky grin on her face!”

“So what happens now?”

“I accept that those fears are part of me, and I pray that I never see them realised.” Satsuki replied, “Now, if you really are me, then you know why I’m here, why I’m risking my life. A friend of mine is in danger. I *will* rescue her, and I will not let myself falter here!”

“Dammit. You’re a real problem child.” Shadow Satsuki said, as her body began to glow, “Just you wait, we will meet again, one of these Loops...”

The shadow’s body began to fade, as a new one took her place. It was a figure similar in size and build to her, with blue skin under white that looked somewhat like the normal look for Junketsu, minus the eyes in the shoulders. In place of each eye was five stars on each shoulder. Its arms ended in two blades, similar to her two Bakuzan blades, the shorter Gako formed the left hand, while Koryu was present at the end of the right arm, replacing it up to the elbow.

Finally there was the being’s head. It was the same white as the Junketsu portions of the body, reaching up to cover the mouth and nose like some sort of mask, as well as reaching around the rest of its head, forming small horns and leaving only a small section of the face, around its featureless amber eyes, exposed.

“Your name is… Mikaboshi…” Satsuki muttered.

“Lady Satsuki’s got a Persona now?” Teddie asked, surprised.

“Apparently so.” Yu replied.

This was proving to be a rather different Loop indeed. Yu wondered how Satsuki would react to Adachi being the murderer…

[Persona 4], [Ib]
A rose’s shadow
Author: Crossoverfan12
Status: PENDING

Ib Awoke a rose held tightly in her hand as she look around. " I'm in the Fabricated World but I've almost always started with my parents when we first get to the art gallery. how did this happen? " She thought to herself as she started walking clutching the rose tighter in her hand. No matter how many times time looped for her her rose always came back with her.

She continued walking noticing that the twisted art gallery was diffrent then usual the paintengs were all solid black and there was a thick fog covering every thing.

"Hey Ib promise that we'll be together forever." Ib stoped in her tracks as she heard that voice call out a shiver going down her spine as another voice was heared.

" I don't want to lie ... but I don't want to tell the truth either ... If you .. need help ... i'll ... come running ... Go on ahead. " " GARRY ! GARRY ARE YOU THERE !?! PLEASE ANSWER ME!" Ib despretly called hopeing for the one person that can provide her with some comfert in this false world. As she called out a figure steped out of the fog behind her. "I don"t know why your bothering calling out you know what those word meen right? you've herard them enough times." Ib quickly tunred to the figure only to come face to face with her self it was an almost perfect copy frome her long brown hair to her red mary-janes the only diffrents was the unnatural yellow eyes. " how many times have you let him die again? Oh right just about as many times as you *killed* mary" the copy stated with a crule smirk on her face " T-thats not.." " True lets face it you know it is all she waanted was of go to the real world but no you had had to kill her and if Garry is still alive you both just leave her there in that fake world. what happend to if only two of us can get out i'll sacrafice my self to let both of them escape? " "How do you even know about that I was alone with Mary when that happend ?!" "Oh thats ease ... I am you." "No that can't be true ! Your lieing ! Your just a fake made by this world! YOUR NOT ME!" Ib yelled out in desperation.

" He he he he he HE HE HE HAHAHAHAAHAH!!! NO IM NOT! NOT ANY MORE!" The copy scrame insanly as shadows swirled around it in a flash the copy was gone. In it's place was a a woman in a red dress she was made out of rose vines and paint was flowing out from under her dress and her claw like hands. she called out" I AM A SHADOW THE TRUE SELF" Ib was stuned at what her shadow had became . It took that operatunity to attack her with its claws. Ib managed to get out of the way but the claw hit her rose causeing it to lose petals . " GGHHHAAAAA!!" She scrame as claw marks apperd on her legs causing her to calpes. Her shadow lomeing over her reedy to strike but befor it could a voice called out. " Izanagi!" and the shadow was hit by a person whereing armor and teen with sliver hair. the teen helped Ib up'

" Are you ok ?" he asked . " I"m fine but how are you and what is that thing and where are we? " My names Yu and ILL explane the rest later but for now lets foces on your shadow. Ok." Ib smiled weakly as she noded her head. "Ok then let's do it " Yu said as he held out his hand as a blue card aperd in it and he shouted " PERSONA !"

[Persona 4], [Disney]
(no title)
Author: MrEgret

Oswald glared at the smirking duplicate of himself, as the standoff continued. He didn't know how he got into the TV, or why he was wandering through a much foggier version of Wasteland, but this...*thing* was really starting to get on his nerves.

"Aww, what's the matter? Getting frustrated, are we?" the duplicate asked mockingly.

Oswald growled, and the duplicate laughed. Everything about this guy made Oswald want to puch him in the face.

Neither Oswald nor his duplicate were rabbits, of course. It seemed that he was replacing some loser named Mitsuo Kubo. He didn't Wake Up until he was in the TV World, but his Loop memories told him all he needed to know about the guy, and he felt the need for a nice long shower after this Loop. Perhaps with Thinner shampoo, to get the memories out.

The duplicate sneered, and began to pace around Oswald, who spun around to keep his face to him. "But then, I guess this isn't the *first* time you got frustrated, is it?" he snapped. "No, that would be allll the way back in ninteen twenty-eight, when that rat bastard of a younger brother stole your spotlight!"

…

"That's not how it went down, damn you!" Oswald roared.

The duplicate didn't even notice, and went on with his speech. "You were a star once! You were big! But then the public got bored of you, and your own father dumped you into that hell hole you call Wasteland! You were bitter, and rightly so! You couldn't deal with being out of the limelight, with being ignored! Oh sure, you may play nice with that usurper nowadays, now that he's finally made up for trashing your home, but you still remember his other crime. Believe me, I know."

At this point, Oswald lost his temper. "Oh yeah? How do you know, you impostor?!" He rushed forward, grabbed his duplicate by the shirt front, and shouted in his face. "Tell me! **Tell me, damn you!**"

The duplicate chuckled, then started laughing maniacally. "Alright! The truth is quite simple, really: *I am you...and **you** are **me**."*

Oswald faintly heard the door opening behind him, and voices yelling at him to get back, to not say it, but he was too eaten up with rage to care. "Liar! YOU ARE NOT ME!"

The duplicate paused when he heard that, and Oswald grinned savagely. *That's right, you jerk. Take that, and choke on it.*

Oswald's cocky grin slowly faded away as the duplicate started to...*laugh?*. "Wonderful..." it drawled.

Suddenly shadows gathered around the duplicate, and blasted Oswald into a nearby pillar. He briefly heard someone (a female?) scream his name, before he blacked out.

…

Yu and the rest of the Investigation Team looked on in horror, as the Shadow of Oswald Kubo took on a much more monstrous form, after throwing the real Oswald into a pillar. Gone was the tall, thin exchange student with surprisingly large feet and searching yellow eyes, dressed in a tuxedo and tails. In its place was an enormous clockwork rabbit, with a cartoonish design, painted in bright gaudy colors that clashed terribly with the exposed metallic parts. It was pitted with rust, and its exposed gears clanked in an endlessly repeating pattern, in time with the turning of the key. Two gargantuan arms, one blocky and cheerfully painted and one angular and obviously metallic stuck out from its sides, and its globular head was balanced on a tightly wound spring. Oil, or possibly ink, tricked in steady rivulets from the rabbit's eyes, and two membranous wings seemingly made of the stuff exploded from the back, on either side of the worn silver key.

The transformed Shadow flared its wings, and pointed at the Investigation Team, as it laughed menacingly. "I am a Shadow, the true self," it intoned. "I'm going to make everything just like it was in the good old days, and I'm not letting a bunch of two-bit punks get in my way!"

[Persona 3]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

Minato stared at the structure that had replaced Gekkoukan High School in this Loop. He stared at it, praying to whoever was listening that his eyes were deceiving him.

"Arisato."

He turned around to see Mitsuru standing behind him, her arms crossed. Besides her was Junpei, moaning, his arms wobbling from the effort of carrying all of the beekeeper suits and insecticide cans.

"We don't have a choice this Loop," she continued. "We might have gotten rid of Ikutsuki early, as usual, but if we don't explore this structure, there is a risk of them overruning the city."

"Yeah," he sighed, "I know."

Once again, he turned back to the skyscraper-sized bee hive, insects flying out of the honeycombs and circling it constantly. "Let's go, then. Get this over with. But we'll need more Raid if we want to survive this trip. A *lot* more."

Sovereign's New Groove - part 1

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Mass Effect], [Admin Shenanigans]
Sovereign's New Groove – Part 1
Author: Gamerex27

The chorus sang in joy. Finally, after thousands of iterations of the Second Cycle, the Ascention had been completed. The superfluous races had been sufficiently contained so that they would no longer pose a problem to the Collective's plans. And the fruit of their labors stood before the will's shell.

The skeletal structure of humanity, enclosed within a freshly-build travel shell, hung in the Fortress at the center of the galaxy. As the drones wielded the final plate into place, the will prepared to bring the new chorus online.

The signal was sent out. The fortress pulsed with energy, the lights dimming momentarily as the structure pumped unimaginable power into the shell of the new will.

The optic at the center of the shell flicked blue, and stabilized into a single cerulean eye.

"Unit designate Human online. The chorus shall sing its first verse to you, Old One."

It would be some time until the will could achieve a cohesive state, as all the voices would eventually fall into sway with the twin powers of indoctrination and programming from the Catalyst.

Had the chorus known as Nazara possessed a mouth, it would have smirked. In spite of the difficulties posed by the presence of the Second Cycle, the First Cycle had finally been completed. The race once known as humanity had ascended to a higher, better form, and it was forever saved from its own destruction. Now, the only task left to do was to eliminate the stragglers and-

---

The Blessed among the will became aware of a change. Gone was the great Fortress, and the shell of the proud new chorus. Sovereign had returned to its resting place in dark space. Extending its reach to the communications systems of the galaxy, it found that, once again, time had reversed itself. In the endless cascade of years, the water's flow of Time had changed direction once again, bringing the will back to this common point.

Just like every iteration of the Second Cycle.

The chorus broke into disharmony. Trillions of voices sang in dissenting tones-confusion, anger, shock, and despair. The millenia of effort, the eons spent perfecting the First Cycle-undone, by a simple, inevitable fact of the universe. The collective argued amongst itself for some time-in human terms, six months-, and the next verse was one of uncertainty. Much of the will elected to continue the efforts of the First Cycle. In one iteration of the Second Cycle, the will had learned that the repetition of time would not be eternal, and would eventually

end. Based off of the smaller and smaller changes in the standard form of the Second Cycle, the will decided that the repetition would end shortly. All Nazara would have to do would be to enact its plans enough times, and they would be bount to succeed.

To borrow a human phrase, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

But they had succeeded. Many, many times. Only for their work to be undone. Again. And again. And again. And. *Again.*

The chorus was now in an uproar. Feuds broke out between the countless voices of the will, and despair triumphed many times over reason. While the voices of the choir would be incomphrehensible to mortals, the best way to describe their attitude would be one of resignation. "Why bother enacting the First Cycle," many voices sung, "if it would only be wiped away by the Second? There is no point."

All attempts had succeeded, and all effort was wiped clean by the inevitable reset. Exterminating the secondary races, then uplifting the ally-less humanity had succeeded, but had been undone. Storing the new chorus in its rift had succeeded, and persisted inside the dimension even after the Second Cycle began anew. But when it removed it into this reality, the will realized that it was now hollow-with all the souls comprising it returned to their original forms, it was nothing more than a lifeless husk. Attempts to uplift every sapient race into its own chorus had succeeded-after thousands of cycles of research to make it plausible-, but were, once again, wiped away.

For an entire Cycle, Sovereign argued amongst itself. The denial of reality had given way to sheer rage. It had barely noticed that an entire iteration of the Second Cycle had gone by while the choir had fractured. It had not at all noticed that the circumstances behind this current iteration were very, very different from usual.

Until four of those circumstances interrupted the chorus itself, with booming voices that shook the Reaper to its very core.

"Your organ has brushed against many possible worlds," one of the anomalies said.

The chorus, as one, fell silent. Sovereign turned its attention to the physical world, to the four figures floating in deep space in front of it. They were simple organics, in monochrome-every aspect of their being was pure, unblemished, harmonious white.

"You have touched the many possible worlds wherin you succeed," the first voice continued, its form of a Prothean floating closer to Sovereign's shell. "*And the many wherin you fail."*

"You have sensed it," the second figure, with the shape of the male Shepard, continued. *"Even if your 'Ascencion' succeeds, your deeds shall be cast into nothingness."*

"The cytoplasm in your being knows, unequivocably," the third figure, with the voice of the female Shepard added, *"That no action of yours can break the Second Cycle. Whenever you or the sons of Man ascend, the Gods inevitably cast them down."*

"But we know a way," the final voice, shaped like Nazara's very own base form, said. *"There is but one way to complete your purpose. To Ascend your life, and forever break the cycle.*"

The will was unsure. These beings were clearly not mere mortals-their lack of suffocation in the vaccum of space was evidence to that. But the will was now desperate. Some way, *any way* to fulfill its purpose-would be accepted.

"What would you have us do?" Sovereign asked.

"We shall design for you a ritual," said the first voice, *"Through which you can Ascend to face the Gods themselves, and ensure that all mankind can escape their machinations."*

"It shall require the structure you call the Citadel, and the destruction of the entity you call the Catalyst," the second voice added. *"But that alone is insufficient."*

The third figure waved its hand, and a structure no bigger than Sovereign's optic appeared: a simple circle with spines extending from its rim, supported by a massive base of wires and steel. *"This is a device of our own making, known as the Yamato Perpetual Reactor. Its purpose is to create black holes, and can normally destroy the universe."*

"While this would merely crash the Second Cycle," the final voice concluded, *"with the combined power of the two, you can Ascend to face the gods."*

"The atom you call Shepard shall Awaken shortly," the first voice said.

As one, the white being spoke. *"Follow us, and we shall forever sever the chain binding us to the will of the gods."*

A wormhole opened behind the White, and the four beings vanished into the rift. Briefly, a set of voices in the deepest reaches of Sovereign's form cried out in fear-that this plan was unnatural, and would undo everything that they were meant to do.

But the will had given in to its own desperation, and had decided that any chance to break the Second Cycle and fulfill its purpose, no matter how dramatic, was vital to the survival of the galaxy. Activating its thrusters, Sovereign pushed itself into the portal.

WARNING: CLASS 3 EVENT IN PROGRESS

POTENTIAL TO ESCALATE TO CLASS 2 INCIDENT:

25%

The Admin of the Amala Loops and God of Tokyo, Taira no Masakado, sat at his terminal in shock.

"This is bad," the minor god said to himself. "The last time a Class Two event occured, an entire universe was lost. This cannot be allowed to occur again: the damage to the Balance of Yggdrasil would be catastrophic."

Shifting to his floating head form for added speed, Masakado rocketed down the halls of the Shinto office of Yggdrasil, heading to the Greek department. "Athena!" he shouted while he was still in the hallway. "We have a *problem*."

Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Something wasn't right. Shepard knew immediately after his briefing ended without a distress call from Eden Prime. The mission had gone off without a hitch, Beacon extracted and Nihlus alive and set to evaluate Shepard for the Spectres. He had that unpleasant feeling that Sovereign was awake...again. Ever since he had started looping, the mechanized space squid had harvested galaxy more times than he could count. Last loop he was awake, Sovereign captured the Normandy before he was even awake and held him prisoner until the indoctrination had turned him into nothing more than a puppet on strings.

He needed to clear his head, the paranoia was getting to him. Making his way to the cargo bay, he took a seat against the beacon, when Nihlus approached, "Problem, commander?"

The Spectre was always polite in the way the Turian usually is, mildly blunt from his military society, but friendly. The loops where he lived were...better in a ways than baseline. Nihlus often shouldered the burden of leadership, leaving Shepard as his second in command. And Shepard returned that trust by always having the Turian's back. Here, though, Nihlus could not help since he wasn't looping. Shepard decided to be truthful, without mentioning the loops, "Yeah...usually these kinds of missions something doesn't go according to plan, like a pirate raid or something. My luck has never been that good and I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Nihlus nodded, "You humans have a saying, 'Anything that can go wrong and it will go wrong at the worst possible moment.'"

Shepard blinked, "A man named Murphy came up with that one."

Nihlus replied, "The Turians have a similar saying, 'The enemy's ambush will occur at our weakest point when we least expect it.' However while I've seen many ambushes, I've witnesses an equal amount where they've hit our strongest point as at our weakest. We're on course for the relay, where a joint Human, Turian, Asari and Salarian task force will take possession of the beacon and study it. You should get some rest. You look like you need it."

At Masakado's workstation, Athena looked the data over and was watching the loop play out. One view screen showed Shepard talking with Nihlus in the cargo bay, while a second screen showed Sovereign entering a Mass Relay for location unknown. Athena's hand drew up Shepard's viewscreen. Plans were made in an instant as she took up residence at another nearby console, accessing her own workstation from this one. With a code adjustment, her machination took shape and the results played across the screen.

The hum of energy caused Shepard to jump away from the beacon, his sidearm already out and pointed at the device. The beacon glowed a sickly green as it grasped Shepard in its

biotic field. It jerked him off his feet, and the world went black around him, with Nihlus shouting his name.

Shepard found himself in a sprawling city, similar to the time he was a General of Rome. He himself was dressed in his usual N7 armor even though the locals wore togas. None took notice of his strange attire, no it was almost as if he wasn't even there.

A female voice echoed above the crowd, "Do you like it? It's Athens in Greece, where I once ruled as its goddess."

His hand tried to draw his Raikou pistol, only for there to be no weapon in his holster. His eyes narrowed, "Who are you?"

Athena gave a nod, "I am Athena goddess of wisdom, courage, strength and many others, admin for the Mass Effect Branch of Yggdrasil or the admin for your universe. I'm glad to finally meet you, Commander Shepard."

His hands crossed as a thought came to him, "I've been hoping to meet you one day. Mind explaining why Sovereign started looping?"

Athena shook her head as her neutral expression dropped into a frown, "That was not my doing. I am the second administrator of the Mass Effect Loops. The first, Ares, is the one who authorized Sovereign's looping. His admin privileges have been removed indefinitely. We will hold a tribunal within the next million loop cycles and decide on his punishment at that time."

Her expression turned grave, "However, that is not why I am here. I have come to warn you that the Sovereign is in danger of ascending to the same level as Yggdrasil."

Shepard's own expression mirrored her own, "I get the feeling that is bad."

Athena nodded, "Correct. If a looper attempted to ascend in such a manner, there is a probability that the loop itself would collapse, erasing your loop from Yggdrasil and every sentient being in it."

Shepard's eyes widened a fraction, "What do I need to do to prevent this?"

Athena's grave expression turned pleased, like Shepard had confirmed a suspicion she had and liked what she discovered, "You have great courage, to face complete annihilation and not flinch away."

Shepard gave a smirk, "Well, it's not the first time I've faced overwhelming odds in the face of total annihilation."

She nodded, "Well said. I need you to head to Citadel immediately. There are a couple loopers there that will aid you in your coming struggle."

"How will I find them?"

Athena gave a small grin of her own, "Don't worry. Even now, their administrator is explaining the situation to them and will meet you when you arrive on the station."

She paused for a second, "Shepard. Before the connection is severed, I must warn you. There are forces at work here in this loop beyond Sovereign. He is not the only one to blame."

Shepard nodded, "Understood."

He then gave a nasty grin, "Next time you see Ares, punch him in the gut for me."

Author: Gamerex27

"-Is trying to become a god, which would destroy reality. Right, got it." The currently-a-krogan sighed, then reached into his Subspace Pocket, pulling out a thick, writhing, worm-like creature. "I hate having to keep doing this, but for some reason I keep Looping in as a normal human. Or whatever the hell I am now."

"Do you have any idea where they are, Lord Masakado?" The turian with the abnromally long fringe began tapping on a metal gauntlet, the screen lighting up a vibrant green in response. "I think I'll need to use the Demon Auction for this, since there don't seem to be many around on this structure to recruit for a party."

"Something about demons being too diverse to classify as a single species, so they're not recognized by the Council," replied the human in gold armor. "Kind of racist if you ask me, but that's politics for you. Maybe it would be better to classify them like how the Compendium does it? Like Megami, Fouls, Fiends..."

"Enough," the avatar of Masakado hosting the conference call said. "Unfortunately, we don't know where they went at the moment: The White are shielding themselves from us-no, I have no idea how." His disembodied face twisted into a scowl. "You are aware that your universes are packed full of viruses second only to the Mega Loop: this appears to be one of them."

"Wouldn't they need a power source to Ascend?" The turian tapped more of his keys on his Gauntlet, bringing up the image of the Yamato Perpetual Reactor he had seen so many times in his own baseline. "Since The White are part of the Expanse, and are technically demons, they would require massive amounts of demonic energy to pull it off. Which means..."

"Shit," the krogan swore, "that means they'll be after Magatsuhi. That's the best energy source possible for that kind of ritual. But to preform something on that scale, it would require more energy that any planet or homeworld has..."

"Hey, I think I got it!" The short, winged asari snapped her fingers. Or, tried to, but since she was stuck in a force field, she couldn't "My Loop memories say that the Protheans were expert demon summoners! If anyone has a big stockpile of Magatsuhi, it'd be them!"

"...Likely stored on their home planet. But no one, not even we, know where it is," Masakado remarked. "Isabeau, you said that you had recovered some Reaper data extracted from the

Geth, correct? Perhaps we could connect that to the Citadel, and find the homeworld from census data?"

"I'm...preoccupied at...the moment!" the quarian yelled as she ran and dodged an alarming number of explosions. "We can...try this...when I get through...with-"

Her end of the call was cut short, as she was engulfed in a massive fireball.

"NOOO-" The turian bit his tongue before he could continue. "I nearly forgot: her current armor reflects flame-based attacks."

"How the hell does that work against explosions?" the human asked. "A bomb's a bomb: a bit of steel plating won't protect you from all the shrapnel!"

"She is still alive," Masakado assured him. "My terminal says that she is not dead yet."

"Great. All we can do is wait for her and Shepard to get here." The krogan held his eye open with one massive hand, and lifted the Magatama into the air with the other. "If you'll excuse me, I need to go power up again."

Unfortunately, he had forgotten to turn off his end of the chat, so the turian, human, and god were stuck hearing his screams of agony until they hung up on him.

Right before Shepard stepped off the docks, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Commander," Kaidan said hesitantly. "I need to tell you something."

"Can it wait?" Shepard asked. "We're in the middle of saving the universe her-"

As he turned around, he saw what appeared to be Kaidan, decked from his neck to his feet in gold-plated armor. In his arm, he held a helmet, with what appeared to he handles stretching from the chin and sides of the face. Its red eyes glared ominously at Shepard.

"Let me guess," Shepard said," you're one of the Loopers from this other Loop."

Kaidan nodded. "Yeah. My real name's kinda fluid...but it's usually Langdon Alder, so let's call me that."

Shepard motioned for Langdon to follow him to the elevator, and the two men walked off onto the dock. "Did your Admin have any ideas to where Sovereign went?"

"He said that they would need fuel for the ritual. The Protheans were Demon-users in this Loop, so the best stockpile of the energy they'd need would be on their homeworld."

"And how are we going to find that?" Shepard asked incredulously as they stepped onto the lift. "No one knows where it is."

"I've played your games in my off time, so I know that, by now, you should have accessed the Prothean beacon." The veteran of the Schwarzwelt put his helmet on. "But since nothing

happened to Eden Prime, you were probably able to get the full dose of the data. We just need to put in the codes in the Citadel's archives, and we've got the location in our hands."

"Wait. In my baseline, Liara studied the Protheans her whole life. Shouldn't whoever's replacing her know where the planet is from their Loop memories?"

"Well, I talked to her with my Admin, and she knows where the *planet is*." Langdon leaned against the glass wall. "But the Reapers scrubbed the location of the Mass Relay we need to get there out of the system. With all that Magatsuhi in one place, they couldn't risk someone stumbling across it and using it against them. But since the Citadel's connected to all the Mass Relays, the locations of all of them should be in the central-"

He was interrupted by a bullet pinging off of his kinetic barriers. Immediately, the two soldiers readied their weapons.

As the elevator door opened, they were treated to a bizarre sight. Right in the middle of C-Sec HQ, a heated battle was taking place. A tall turian with white facial markings across his eyes and an unnaturally long fringe was trading bullets from behind cover with, of all people, *Saren.*

"You do realize that continuing to fight is pointless, correct?" As he spoke, the turian manipulated the metal gauntlet on his hand, and a snowman wearing a jester's hat appeared next to him in a flash of light. "That video of you conspiring with the Reapers has already gone vital...viral?...Yes, *viral*, so there is nowhere for you to run."

"That...does not matter," Saren said in an oddly monotone voice. From what Shepard could see as he and Langdon dived into cover, he had far more cybernetic implants than he had in baseline: it was likely that any traces of his free will or personal plans were gone. "The Reapers shall topple your great...empires...and the harvest shall come. Nothing you can...do, can...stop it."

"I sincerely doubt that." With a gesture of his hand, the demon launched a colossal chunk of ice (about the size of the elevator Shepard had just stepped off of) flying towards Saren. The desk he was hiding behind was sent flying into the wall, and Saren went with it. A sickening crunch of bones breaking resounded through the air. Somehow, Saren's upper body remained free, and he aimed his assault rifle at the stranger's head and fired.

Right before impact, the man waved his hand, and a spherical, transluscent barrier sprang into existence around him. The bullet promptly bounced off of the shield and ricocheted back towards Saren, impacting him in his hand. He dropped the gun (since the fingers he was using to hold it were gone), and was thus powerless when the stranger approached him, his demon vanishing with a quick "Hee-ho!" and a flash of light.

"The local equivalent of the Samurai shall be here momentarily. You shall be apprehended for your crimes. And there is nothing that you can do."

His face twisted into the turian equivalent of an ear-to-ear grin. "But first, give me all your money."

For a few seconds, the room was dead silent as the hardened soldiers and agent of the Reapers processed this request. Eventually, Saren was only to force out a single, incredulous word. "What?"

"You heard me," the stranger said, as he unsheathed a sword from his belt and pointed it at Saren's neck. "You are a criminal now, so your bank accounts have been frozen and seizd by the government. And since I work for them as a Samura-*Spectre*, I can take funds from them if need be. Now, *hand it over!*"

What happened next is something that both Shepard and Langdon agreed to never speak of again. The stranger used every possible method to get money out of Saren, and eventually came away carrying several handfuls of credit chits. Stuffing them into his Subspace Pocket, he finally noticed the two soldiers. "It is good to see you again, Langdon. As well as you, Commander Shepard."

"Did you just *mug* Saren?!" Shepard asked in disbelief.

"Flynn does that all the time," Langdon said dismissively. "More importantly, how did he have that much money on him?"

Flynn shrugged. "I have no idea. I always seem to find more money than anyone should reasonably have on them. Which is good for me, because you won't *believe* how expensive armor and bribing Charon are in my Loop."

Shepard clears his throat, bringing the two Amala Loopers to focus on the task at hand. "If you are all replacing my baseline crew, the next person to find is Wrex. Big krogan, loved fighting, and usually ends up running his species when he doesn't die. He should be fighting a crime lord named Fist right about now."

Flynn grimaced. "Then there is only one person who could replace him. We need to save that poor man."

As the trio ran off, Shepard asked a question he was all but certain he already knew the answer to. "Saving your friend from Fist, or Fist from your friend?"

"What do you think?"

Chora's Den was eerily quiet when they got there. The club was littered with corpses: guards with holes punched through their stomachs and armor, a krogan bodyguard blackened and charred by what must have been a massive blast of electricity, and several piles of ash Shepard could only assume were once people.

"I think we can take it easy now, guys," said Langdon. "Now we just need to get to Naoki before he ends up blowing a hole through the entire Citadel. Kid never knew how to reign himself in."

As they made their way to Fist's office, they could make out a faint, soft voice. "I'm going to ask this again, Fist. Where is the quarian?"

"I...I told you, I d-don't know!" Fist whimpered back.

When they entered the room, they saw Fist being pinned against the wall by the massive hand of a krogan. This one was vastly different than the usual ones though: from the waist up, he wore no armor, revealing a patter of glowing, blue tattoos that ran up and down his scaly skin. Like Grunt and the younger krogan, his facial plate had not finished forming yet, and was instead a series of glowing ridges lining the top of his forehead. His hump ended in a point, almost giving the appearance of it being a horn.

"They always say that," the krogan said under his breath, "and they're always lying. Do you know what I did to your guards out there, Fist?"

The smell of ammonia began to spread throughout the room. "You k-k-killed them?"

The krogan gave him what could only be called a shit-eating grin. "Well, yeah, but you don't know how I killed them."

"You see," he said as his eyes began to glow white, "I'm really a demon. Which means that I used magic. Lightning, fire, force, the works. But my favorite spell?"

His body darkened, as if someone had spilled pitch-black paint all over him. "Freikugel. Or, as I like to call it, *eye lasers.* Now, tell me where the girl is, or I'll *burn your face right off your head.*"

"W-w-w-w-Warrens!" Fist blurted out. "She's in the Warrens. Please, DON'T HURT ME!" With that, the hardened crime boss collapsed in a dead faint that would make Rarity proud.

Releasing his grip, the demon-krogan let the criminal drop to the ground, and he finally turned around to face the other men in the room. "Oh, here you are. I was wondering when you'd show up: it was annoying, taking all these guys out on my own." He lifted a small grey bead out of his subspace pocket. "I had to burn a whole Life Bead just to make sure I could keep doing the interesting attacks, and not just punch them all to death!"

Behind his opaque helmet, Langdon rolled his eyes. "Shepard, this is Naoki Kashima. The Anchor for the Conception portion of the Amala Loops-"

"Nice to see a new face, too," Naoki interrupted. "So, Flynn's girlfriend," he said with a wink," is in the Warrens. Let me just call in some help and I'll be good to go."

"I do not see why her being both a girl and my friend is anything to make note of," Flynn said as Naoki tapped away on an anachronistic electronic tablet.

The Demifiend looked up." Oh, right. Medieval world and all. It means she's your *girl.*"

Silence.

Naoki sighed. "You know, your ladyfriend?"

Still more silence.

"Seriously? You don't know?" Naoki rolled his eyes, and turned back to his tablet. "It means she's your *lover*."

Flynn's eyes popped open at this, and his mandibles extended first in shock, then in anger. "She is not my-we are merely friends!"

"Isn't that what they all say." With a chuckle, Naoki tapped in a final command, and the sound of a cash register opening sounded from the tablet. In a flash of light beside Naoki, a short asari girl appeared, the large, butterfly-like wings on her back flapping rapidly to keep her afloat.

"I was wondering when you would call me back," she said, with a touch of boredom to her voice. "You know, I was caught in some kind of force field ever since I Awoke? I've had a *killer* itch on my nose the whole time, and I think I lost a few levels while I was just sitting there."

Winged fairy asari. Sure, why not, Shepard thought.

"So, that's only Isabeau left. We usually only have a few minutes before Tali would get killed, so let's get going."

"Relax," the Pixie said. "Since I started Looping, I've spend some time looking into how those Amala Drums work. Add that to the psychic powers I've got this Loop and I can just-"

Before Shepard could explain that biotics were not, in fact, psychic powers, the Pixie thrust out her hands, and the group felt a lurching feeling in their stomachs. The surroundings around them blurred, and when they could see clearly again, they found themselves in an alleyway.

"-teleport us there! Cool, isn't it?" Pixie fluttered about, moving into a reclining position as if she were sitting on the air itself.

"-Now, you got the intel?"

Shepard twisted around to see a turian reaching out towards a quarian woman dressed in a navy encounter suit. She stood stock still as the turian reached out to her cheek, and-

The Commander closes his eyes, took out his pistol, and fired three shots. The sound of five bodies hitting the ground sounded.

Opening his eyes, Shepard could see that he had indeed managed to kill three of the thugs without even looking-thousands of Loops gave him practice in predicting exactly where they would be. Beside Isabeau lay a headless corse, and the mangled, twisted body of the turian who had tried to touch her, his limbs and neck twisted at impossible angles.

The quarian dispelled the wind spell in her off hand, and sheathed her sword. She turned to Shepard and the rest of the Amala Loopers. "I take it that you are the...Anchor for this Loop?"

Nodding, Commander Shepard stepped towards her, and stuck out his hand for a handshake. "Commander Shepard. Alliance Navy, Spectre, and killer of more Reapers that I can count."

Isabeau stuck her hand right next to Shepard, apparently misunderstanding the gesture. "My name is Isa'Beau nar Mikado vas..." She shook her head violently. "My apologies. It's only Isabeau. I sometimes have trouble distinguishing between my own memories and those forged by entering these different Loops."

Shepard grabbed her hand, and shook it up and down. "Good to meet you all. Now, do you have any idea where the data for the Mass Relay is?"

"I am not...usually knowledgable about computers," Isabeau said hesitantly, "but the memories I had prior to...Awakening, say that they are likely stored in the center of government on this world."

"Which should be the Council's chamber," Flynn finished. "Come: let us make haste."

"It isn't the Middle Ages anymore, kid." Langdon slapped the Samurai on the back good-naturedly. "You can drop all of the stiff talk."

Flynn's mandibles tightened across his face. "I have spoken in this way for hundreds of years: I haven't exactly learned all of the conceits behind this modern dialect, so I believe I will continue to speak this way until I can master-"

"Forget I asked," grumbled Langdon. "Let's just get going. Commander, I think you could use this."

He waved his omni-tool, and Shepard received a download through wireless transfer. "What's this?" he asked.

As they walked towards the Council's chamber, the Spess Murhen grinned beneath his mask. "It's what Flynn, Isabeau and I use to deal with demons. This'll let you talk to, recruit-and, for some reason, *see* in my Loop- demons. It's called the Demon Summoning Program."

At first, Shepard thought that this was just another oddity of the Loop. Maybe all of the civilians were all asleep right now.

But that didn't account for why they had seen only a handful of people all the way from the docks to the Council's chamber. All they had were a crippled Saren back in the office, an unconsious Fist, the Keepers, and the two C-Sec officers on patrol right in front of them.

When they saw Shepard's motley crew, they stiffened on the spot. "What are you doing here?!" One of them-the senior officer, most likely-strode towards them, his hand already going to his pistol. "Why weren't you evacuated with the others?"

Shepard raised his eyebrow. "Evacuated?"

"Don't play smart with us," said the younger officer. "You're lucky you weren't just killed in that Geth attack."

"Now we need to radio Palin to bring in *another* shuttle to get rid of stragglers. Third set this day. Stay right there, and don't move."

Flynn stepped forwards, clearing his throat. "My good sirs, I don't think that will be nessecary." He tapped at his Gauntlet, bringing up a picture of his current form and what appeared to be a Spectre liscence. "Frinn Ho'Goshan, Special Tactics and Reconnasaince."

The elder officer stared at the Gauntlet for a moment, and his eyes practically popped out of his head. "Oh! I'm terribly sorry, sir. I didn't realize it was you!"

"Frinn? You're the one who they sent to-"

The Samurai nodded. "Yes, but that's not important now. I apprehended Saren. He's currently trapped under a table in what's left of your offices. Don't worry about getting shot at: his legs are broken, his trigger hand is missing most of its fingers, and I believe that he has had too many cybernetic implants to still use his biotics. Hurry: he set a bomb in the Council chamber that could blow up the whole station, and-"

Both men turned pale. "Rightsorrytobotheryousir,goodluckwiththat!" With that, both humans ran towards the office.

Flynn continued walking towards the deserted Council chamber, and the rest of the group followed.

"What happened in this Loop?" Shepard asked. At this point, he just had to know.

After being silent for a few moments, Flynn replied. "I Awoke several years ago, while I was still enlisted in the turian military. I shortly realized that I was under consideration for the Specters, and was being monitored to see if I was a worthy candidate for the job. As I understand from Langdon, the man I am replacing usually drops out of this program to join the local law enforcement agency."

"However," he said, as they walked up a flight of stairs, "I declined to do so. After embarking on several missions with a Specter-who is unfortunately dead now-I was permitted to join their ranks."

"Several years ago," he continued," there was an...incident between Saren and a human by the name of Anderson, who was also being evaluated as a potential Specter. Something went wrong on their mission. Anderson was denied access into their ranks, and Saren vanished in the aftermath of whatever happened. After he had been missing for several years, the Council ordered more and more Specters to join in on the search, including this universe's versions of my friends Walter and Jonathan-who have yet to begin Looping in my home universe- and eventually, myself."

"The three of us decided to risk summoning several powerful demons to aid us on our search-normally an illegal practice in Citadel space, but as Specters, we were exempt from this law. As the demons usually contracted through the likes of the Summoning Program are lesser reflections of the true demons, we decided to use a human book, the Ars Goetia, to summon the true forms of demons, who were typically associated with knowledge. Vassago, Barbas,

Ose, Dantalion...While we were forced to sacrifice a great deal of resources to gain their services (since they refused to form a contract through the Program), they eventually told us the truth behind his dissapearance."

"Saren had gone rogue. He had fallen under the sway of a sapient star ship-what you call Sovereign-and he had assembled an army of Geth for nefarious purposes. As we knew that the Council would not trust the words of demons, we journeyed to the planet where Saren was hiding out, to obtain proof of his treachery. It was...nightmarish. The moment we stepped off of our ship, we were assaulted by dozens of geth and demons, working in conjunction to destroy us utterly. We fought our way to the centre of Saren's compound." The group reached the second flight of stairs. "In his absence, Saren had received so many cybernetic enhancements, he had long since ceased resembling anything huma-er, turian." Shepard thought back to the twisted, skeletal, Husk-like Saren he usually fought during the battle of the Citadel.

"Walter and Jonathan volunteed to distract Saren while I would scour his terminal for proof of his treason. While I was successful, they eventually fell to his demons-some of the strongest I have seen in any Loops." Flynn sighed. "I know that they will be back in the next Loop I am Awake, but it was still sickening to know that I sent them to their dooms."

"And after that," Langdon concluded, "Flynn sent the Council his proof. Sovereign had ordered Saren to invade the Citadel, and kill every living being on it, so that they could harness the place's power for the Ritual the Admins told us about. Hence why there's nobody here: everyone evacuated, and the standing army went to intercept what was left of Saren's forces. Those two back there were probably looking for stragglers."

"We're here!" Pixie announced. "Since I replaced that scientist lady, I mostly know where the Protheans lived. All you need to do is find the co-ordinates for the Relay, and we'll be good to go."

Nodding, Shepard walked towards the terminal in the center of the room. He had hacked into the Prothean Archives several times in his usual Loops (mostly to find things to troll Javik with, and once to find a Prothean bedtime story for a young Javik in a very bizzare Loop where he was found in the coffin as an infant).

He eventually found the location of the Relay, and downloaded it into his Omni-tool. "Got it. Pixie, can you teleport us back to the Normandy? Time is of the essence here."

"I wish," Naoki grumbled. "Sure, it's impressive, but it chews through her energy so fast it's not even funny. We're going to need all the power we can get if we want to beat that giant squid. Plus, there's the fact we could just take one of those automated shuttles to the dock in like 2 minutes."

Looking at Pixie, Shepard could see that she did look very tired: obviously, that trick could only be used sparingly. "Right, shuttle it is. Someone's going to have to sit on someone's lap: there aren't enough seats."

At this, Pixie giggled. "Oh, I'll do it! Mister Langdon, can I sit in your lap?"

"You could just go back into Naoki's Pocket," the soldier pointed out.

At this, Pixie pouted. "Killjoy."

"We'll reach the Relay in about two hours, Commander. You want to phone a friend or ask the audience, guys, you should probably do that now."

Rolling her eyes at Joker's jest, Isabeau returned to making the finishing touches on the last of her twelve magic circles.

Shepard looked up from spending Saren's stolen credits on the Summoning Program to hire some demons, and saw the massive mess Isabeau and Naoki were making on his floor."What exactly are you doing?" Shepard asked.

"Like I said," Naoki replied, "We need more power. And since the versions of these Demons in our Compendiums would be too weak to use for this fight, we'll need to call in their true forms."

"Alright," Langdon said, looking down at the pair's work, "that should do. Burroughs, you have the invocation ready?"

From the projection on Isabeau's Gauntlet, the A.I. and part-time Goddess of Tokyo nodded. "I have prepared the vocal component we need to summon them. However, it is likely that they will not be constrained by the circle, and could possibly lash out at their summoner. Do you want to go on?"

Isabeau nodded. "If Sovereign is truly attempting to destroy the Loop forever, we *need* the Fiends. Do it."

With that, Burroughs began chanting in what appeared to be a mix between Latin and Hebrew. The circles began to glow with an unearthly light, enimating from the Candelabrum of Sovereignty placed at the center of the circles. Energy began crackling around the cargo bay, setting the hairs on Shepard's neck on edge.

Kneeling besides the largest of the circles, Naoki stretched out his massive hand, and the lightning began to coalesce in his palm. "Damn," he hissed through clenched teeth, "this stings. Somebody's gotta stop this energy from blowing up the ship, though. Maybe I'll get a Magatama out of it."

Before Shepard could yell at Naoki for trying something that could have blown up the Normandy, the entire room was filled with bright light, blinding everyone there.

When it faded, eleven figures stood in all but one of the circles. Judging by the fact that all but one of them were skeletons, they were most likely demons.

Four of them were on horseback, including the one in the biggest circle. While they wore the same robes, their horses differed greatly: one with a coat as red as blood, one with a pelt as black as night, one white and covered with eyes, and one pale as a corpse. One clad in gaudy

yellow robes, sitting cross-legged on the ground, and holding a small golden bell in one hand. One wearing a red scarf and a sneer on its skull (somehow conveyed with the lack of an actual face), and sat atop a vintage motorcycle. One wearing purple robes and holding a wineglass in its hand, and straddling a massive seven-headed beast. One clad in white robes and holding a trumpet, hovering in the air above his circle. One was a little blond girl, bouncing up and down in place, a steak knife poorly hidden behind her back.

And finally, a skeleton in a gaudy red outfit, holding a violin in one hand and a bow in the other. Who, immediately upon seeing Shepard, bellowed "YOU!" and bolted out of the circle towards him, bow pointed at his throat.

"Hey, HEY! David! Calm the hell down!" Instantly, Langdon's gun was out of his holster and in his hands. Electricity began to cackle in the barrel of the pistol, as he leveled it at the skeleton's head.

"Absolutely not! Do you have ANY IDEA about what this man has DONE?!"

From inside his circle, the yellow-clad skeleton facepalmed. "David, would you kindly wait until *after* our summoners have stated the terms of their contract until you try to murder them?"

"No, Daisoujou," the musician spat, "I will not forgive this man. Not after the atrocities he has committed against the art of dancing."

Silence.

Shepard raised his eyebrow. "Wait. You want to kill me...for my *dancing*?"

"Of course! I *am* the Fiend of song and dance! And, after seeing the flailing that you dare to call dancing, I must make you answer for your GAAACK-"

Whatever he was about to say was cut off as a scythe sliced through his neck, severing his head from his shoulders. Shepard lowered the gun he had steathily leveled towards its torso in bemusement. "And here I was ready to blow him to bits. Or at least try out this program I just got."

The rider of the pale horse, which was now pawing the ground after having sprung into action and dashing to Shepard's rescue, lowered his scythe. "Whilst seeing the sons of man defeat my more irritating brothers never ceases to be amusing, I am afraid that I had to stop the fight before it began. I refuse to have our family's honor besmirched by such petty arguments."

The Pale Rider-or as he was more commonly known, the Grim Reaper-reclined on his horse, and swept his gaze across the room. "Now, why hast thou summoned the incarnations of Death itself?"

"We have a job for you," Shepard replied. "If you want to do it, you'll find your payment at our current destination."

"So as long as we art paid in good Magatsuhi," the Black Rider said, "We art willing to hear thou out."

"Now, speak," said the Red Rider, "and tell us of whom you shall loose upon the hounds of war."

Death and the rest of the Fiends listened to Shepard's proposal. For a few moments, they were silent as they digested the informaton of what the Loopers were up against.

Eventually, one of them spoke up.

"If your foe Ascending will wipe this Loop from existence as you claim," Death asked, "Why should we help you?"

"You are aware," added Pestilence, "that our purpose is to bring destruction and desolation to the universe. We are the harbingers of your apocalypse."

"Really," the Trumpeter said, raising his instrument to his mouth, "we should be helping *him*. Give us one good reason why we shouldn't raze this ship to the ground so we can fulfill our true purpose."

Well, shit. That backfired. Shepard shot Naoki a dirty look. The krogan only shrugged in response. "We could just beat them into submission. That usually works."

"Not everything needs to be solved with your fists," Shepard said in reply.

Throughout the course of the Loops, Shepard had honed his speaking skills to their peak. He could-and had-built up entire armies with a single speech, caused the Collector General to personally rebel against Harbinger, and made the entire Batarian armada wet themselves and flee with their tails between their legs. If he could convince Saren to kill himself in the baseline, surely he could talk down the avatars of Death itself from ending the world. He racked his brain about information on the Four Horsemen, from several Loops where he had replaced Ashley and grown up reading the-

That's it.

"Fiends," Shepard said slowly, "what exactly would you do after you end the world?"

"Oooh, oooh!" Alice bounced up and down in place, her dress fluttering in the air. "I'll get this one! After we have everyone **DIE FOR ME** and go to stay with Uncle Belly and Uncle Nebby and Mr. Charon, we'll go fight that meanypants YHVH in a super-fun battle for the fate of existence itself!"

"Yes," War said, a note of madness slipping into its voice, "the war shall last forever more! We shall fight the forces of Law for eons unending, as all of history comes crashing to an end, and-"

Shepard had been to the Hub several times, and had played the backup of his universe Yggdrasil had turned into a game. He could never get his or her face to look right sadly. What

he did now, however, could be construed as a Paragon Interrupt.

"That's just it," Shepard said, cutting the Rider off. "If Sovereign wins, there won't *be* any more battles to fight. No afterlife for people to go to, and no God for you to fight."

If War had a face, it would be twisted in confusion now. "Explain."

"If someone Ascends to the same level as the Admins-you know about them, right?" Several nods from the Horsemen and the rest of the Fiends, and Shepard continued. "Then this entire Loop will never have existed. Alice, those uncles you mentioned? They would never have been created. You never would have been with them, because none of you would exist."

Alice gasped in shock. Her eyes started to water up at the thought of being separated from her beloved uncles.

"This wouldn't be the apocalypse you want," Shepard continued, "this would be complete and total oblivion, on every level you could imagine. If Sovereign and the White win, *you* will never had existed."

"Then...that would mean no excesses to indulge in," the Mother Harlot said with a tinge of fear to her voice. "No alcohol to drink, no drugs to snort, no sex to be had..."

"No diseases to inflict on mankind," Pestilence added, dropping the overly formal speech due to its shock.

"And...no war to be fought." War sighed. "You have made your point, son of man."

"Indeed." Death held out his skeletal hand to Shepard. "This end you mention is not the end we desire. We accept the terms of this contract-to fight alongside you until your foes are defeated."

"Eh, I never liked the White anyways. Whiny emo bitches. 'Oh, life is meaningless, we should kill everything by dumping it into a big black hole!' " The Hell Biker idly revved his motorcycle. "If you're gonna end the world, at least make it flashy and fun, and not some sissy angst-fest."

"Feh. At least they will put up a good fight," the voice of the last demon said as Shepard shook the Grim Reaper's hand, sealing their contract.

Naoki growled as the final Fiend stepped forward from behind the girth of Mother Harlot's massive beast. The skeleton was dressed top to bottom in the gaudiest outfit possible: bright red and blues, and a feathered cap upon his head. In one hand, he held a fencing sabre: in the other a large piece of red cloth.

"I have no quarrel with you, Demi-fiend," the Madator said, noting the krogan's blatant irritation. "I take it that your encounter with me in the first Loop was..."

"A pain in the ass," Naoki said, gritting his teeth. "For someone obsessed with bravery and power, you used a hell of a lot of evasion-boosting spells."

"Look," Langdon interrupted the two bickering demons, "we'll need as much help as we can if we're going to get past Sovereign's forces. And his Capote is too overpowered *not* to use."

"I am afraid he is correct," Isabeau added. "We are on the brink of total oblivion: I would suggest that you put aside your grievances and focus on the battle to come."

"Fine. But I'm *not* putting him on my team. As far as I care, one of you can take that cheap bastard and-"

The air in the ship *rippled,* and reality itself seemed to groan in pain. Shepard's vision blurred, and he fell to his knees, his fall mirrored by the rest of the mortals.

"Joker," Shepard managed to say, in spite of his vertigo, "get us to the Relay ASAP. It looks like Sovereign's already gotten started."

"Remind me what your plan is again?" Naoki asked, shifting in his seat in the ship's conference room.

"If Sovereign is anything like Harbinger," Shepard said, "he'll have hordes of minions on the other side of that Relay. We'll need a diversion to get past them, which is where you'll come in. Flynn, Isabeau, you'll go with Daisoujou, Mother Harlot, and David.

"The further I can stay away from *you*," grumbled the newly-mended musician, "the better."

"Naoki, Pixie, you're with Biker, Trumpeter, and Alice. Langdon-help me out with this armor-you'll go with Pestilence, Famine, and War."

"Why are we the diversion?" Langdon asked as he helped Shepard fasten on his spare DEMONICA suit. "Do you really plan on confronting Sovereign alone?"

"Sovereign's Looping too," Shepard replied, "so he won't stop trying to break the Loop if we just beat him. The only way to really beat him is to convince him that what's he's doing goes against his prime directive."

"Oh, I get it!" Pixie snapped her fingers, lighting the magical inscence on the ground and blowing the smoke throughout the room. "Since the best speeches these guys have done is bribing demons to join them..."

"*Negotiating* with them," Flynn snapped, a tinge of annoyance to his voice.

"...You're the only one who can talk him down!" Pixie inhaled the smoke, the magical energy the MA Incense emitted flowing throughout her tiny body. "It's like a fairy tale! The little piggy shouts down the big bad wolf from the ledge!" Her mouth turned downwards into a frown. "Wait, or was it the wolf blowing at the pig? I can never get that one right."

"Right. I'll go with Matador and Death, since they seem to be the strongest according to you, and fight our way to Sovereign," Shepard concluded. "And, judging by where we are," he added, looking out the window to see the Mass Relay looming ahead, "we should be there in three, two..."

The outside of the Normandy crackled with blue energy, and abruptly vanished.

"...One."

Shepard turned on the infrared eyes of his new DEMONICA suit, and toggled the ammo on his Widow rifle to fire-type. "Joker, use that new cannon to shoot down anything that moves and get us to a safe landing spot."

"Uh, Shepard?" In the cockpit, Joker squinted at the bizzare spectacle ahead. Or rather, the *lack* of a spectacle of any kind. "That should be pretty easy to do, since there's nothing out there."

"What?"

To Shepard's bemusement, Joker was correct: no ships or demons awaited them when they exited the Relay, or even when they entered the planet's atmosphere.

"Is he trying to goad us into a false sense of security?" Isabeau asked, blinking behind her foggy faceplate.

"Sovereign didn't attack at Eden Prime, either. Either this ritual needs him to devote all of his attention to this..."

"Or he's too obsessed with escaping the Loops that he forgot to set up defenses." Langdon smirked. "Sometimes this happens with the Three Wise Men back home, when Arthur and I find out how to escape the Schwarzwelt early. They get so desperate to keep us in that they forget to send in the angels to fight us later."

"Even if Sovereign is too busy with the ritual, that doesn't mean the White aren't." Isabeau grabbed her Spur from her belt. "It's likely that the capital city will be swarming with demons."

"Usually," Flynn added, "when we beat the White in combat, they stay down for a while. If we can hunt them down..."

"We could disrupt the ritual!" Shepard began walking towards the airlock as the Normandy descended into the capital city of the dead Prothean Empire. "Can your AI find them, Isabeau!"

"She should be able to track them down if we follow the current of demonic energy to their sources," the Samurai replied.

"Get her to send the co-ordinates to everyone." Shepard ordered. "Split up into the 4 squads we discussed before, and hunt those sons of bitches down."

"You know," Langdon remarked as they reached the airlock, "it's been a long time since the phrase 'saving the world' had any actual meaning."

"It's always nice to go back to basics," Shepard agreed.

CHANCE OF CLASS 3 INCIDENT TO ESCALATE TO CLASS 2:

66%

Miscellaneous part 2 & Naoki loses it - Part 1

Chapter Notes

> The most important part of this segment is Naoki loses it, at the bottom. It's part of a large, extremely significant arc.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4]
(no title)
Authors: Half_Baked_Cat, wildrook
Status: REJECTED

Ryoji: So, girls dig guys who are willing to crossdress?
Junpei: Of course. They also dig yaoi, but that would prevent you from getting with the girls.
Ryoji: Ok. *Goes puts on a maid outfit*

One Hour Later:

Ryoji: *Surrounded by girls* I need to remember to thank Junpei for the advise.

Yosuke: Well, it worked for Narukami, for some odd reason.

Yu: That's what scares me.

[Persona 4], [JoJo's Bizarre Adventure – Diamond is Unbreakable]
Yu Narukami's Bizarre Adventure
Author: GioGio

Yu sighed as he cut down yet another Shadow, for what seemed like the billionth time (Which it probably was, relatively speaking). The rest of the Investigation Team was behind him, dealing with any Shadows that were coming from the sides. Yu pushed up his glasses a bit to keep them from falling from his nose.

It was a fairly standard Loop. If Yu didn't know any better, he would have just assumed that things were just playing out as normal once again, no glaring variations of Fusions.

"No, no, no! That's too average! Hardly deserving to be called a victory pose!"

Ah yes, there was the thing that made this loop different.

Rohan Kishibe then stormed towards him, paper and pens held in his left hand, before he got to Yu's face and said, "If I'm going to make my manga perfect, I MUST give my readers a

sense of relief! That the heroes had finally pulled an epic victory from the jaws of defeat! Gah! I'll do it myself!"

Rohan then brought Yu's right arm, which held his katana, and lifted it before bending the wrist so that the blade would be pointing to the ground, he then lifted Yu's left hand and had it placed on top of his right hands palm.

"Dude!" Yosuke shouted, glaring at Rohan. "Don't criticize how we look when we beat up a Shadow! We're not just some freaking models for your manga!"

"Are you just upset Rohan-sensei's making you the quirky comic relief of Pink Dark Boy?" Yukiko asked, making Yosuke groan as Rohan began positioning Yu's head so that it was tilted towards the sky slightly.

"Yeah, I gotta admit, why *do* we let that jackass hang with us again?" Kanji asked while scratching the back of his head.

"Apparently, he's Senpai's friend." Naoto answered, observing Rohan continuing to position Yu into his desired pose. "Senpai must be really uncomfortable right now..."

"Sensei sure makes some strange friends..." Teddy muttered out quietly.

"You look awesome Narukami!" Chie shouted out words of encouragement, only for Yosuke to snort.

"You're just saying that because Rohan promised to make the chick based on you in his manga the main character..."

Yu sighed as his muscles ached while Rohan stood in front of him drawing on his papers and hearing Chie kick the crap out of Yosuke.

Josuke was *seriously* going to owe him one for this...

[Persona 4], [My Little Pony]
My Little Persona – part 1
Author: Gamerex27

Yu Narukami Awoke lying in bed. Something immediately felt off. For one thing, he felt much smaller than usual. He quickly thought that he might have Awoken earlier in his timeline in this particular variant.

He was partially correct: he certainly was younger this Loop. However, as he discovered when he tried to get out of bed, that wasn't the only thing that was different.

His shoulders refused to move the way he wanted them too. Grunting, he struggled to get up, waving his limbs vainly in an attempt to get his numb fingers to push himself up.

And, when he got a glimpse of his limbs, he understood why he couldn't feel his fingers. Because, at the time, he didn't have any. In place of his hand was a gray-furred hoof.

Great, the Seeker of Truth thought to himself. *This must be Equestria, then*.

He skimmed his Loop memories. Apparently, his name here was True Sight (still not as bad as the Sisterhood Complex Kingpin of Steel), and he was still in grade school; today was the first day. Looking behind him, he saw that he was covered front to back in a dishwasher gray coat. According to his memories, there was supposed to be a symbol on his flank called a "Cutie Mark" (he rolled his eyes at this), but he was too young to have one.

He sent out a Ping, and got back around a dozen responses. At least he wasn't alone this Loop (though, since Igor was the Anchor back home, he didn't have to worry about Lonely Loops like some other Loopers).

"True! You up in there!" That was immistakably Dojima's voice.

"Yeah," Yu said, in a voice that was too high-pitched for his liking. "I just need to grab my books, and I'll be on my way."

"Big bro!" said another voice, most definetly Nanako's. "Come eat breakfast! Your alfalfa browns are getting cold!"

Yes, this was going to be a *strange* Loop.

…

As Yu took his seat in class, he scanned the rest of the classroom. Several of the peo-ponies looked suspiciously familiar. One of them, wearing Naoto's hat, tipped her cap in their usual signal to tell if they were Awake-and, since she took it off afterwards, all of them were. Yu nodded in turn.

"Oh, great," said a voice behind him, "it's a whole *herd* of blank flanks. As if the three weren't enough."

Considering how his Loop Memories told him that the phrase was a derogatory term, Yu figured that this must be a bully. Turning his head, he saw a pink filly sneering at him, reminding him somewhat of King Moron from her attitude.

While the best way-in his experiences, at least-to deal with jerks was to ignore them, that didn't mean it was the only solution.

Hey, Bro, Yosuke (here called Second Wheel) said, using a private telepathy spell. *I'm not looking forwards to spending a whole year with these girls. You want to stop them before they get started?*

Sure, Yu replied. *But I think we should let everyone else get a turn, too.*

Damn right, we will, Kanji (or Steel Weaver this time) added. *I want to shut these assholes down before they can get to anyone else.*

Behind Yu, Yukiko snorted, desperately trying to hold in her laughter. Considering how nearly everything in this Loop was named after a horse pun of some kind, it was amazing that

Yukiko was able to keep her cool for this long without breaking down into another laughing fit.

"That's a lot of books on your desk, blank flank," said another pony condescendingly. She glared at Yukiko, who gave no sign of noticing them.

Diamond Tiara bumped hooves with Silver Spoon, and sneered again. "Too bad you won't be needing them, since you don't even have a Cutie Mark for reading. Or anything. Your head's as blank as your own flank."

That as the final straw for the black pony: she collapsed into helpless laughter, sliding out of her seat and onto the ground.

Diamond and Silver instantly stopped laughing at her expense, and turned to stare at the other filly. "What's... so funny, blankie?" Diamond put on a half-hearted sneer, clearly thrown off of her game when Yukiko reacted in the exact opposite way she expected.

"P..p...Ponyville....heeee.....Steamy Sanctuary.....ho....blank....FLANK! AHAHAHAHAHAHA!" Yukiko beat her hooves on the ground, her eyes already starting to water up out of sheer mirth.

Diamond Tiara's mask of carefully constructed disdain shattered to pieces, replaced by a look of absolute horror. This *blank flank* was *mocking her!* "Stop that! Stop laughing at me!"

Yukiko payed her no heed, and she continued to literally roll around on the floor, laughing.

"STOP LAUGHING AT ME!" Her plans thoroughly dashed, Diamond Tiara screamed in frusturation, and stormed out of the classroom, followed by an equally annoyed Silver Spoon.

The room was silent, save for the teacher droning on and on about long division (it was amazing, Yu had thought many times over his countless Loops, how little teachers noticed what was going on in their own classrooms) and Yukiko's laughter. The sound of applause came from nowhere. Yu turned his gaze to see three fillies sitting together, clapping their hooves wildly. The Awake Cutie Mark Crusaders were very impressed.

…

The next day, the pair of disgruntled bullies decided to try again, this time with the gray-coated blank flank.

"You're staring at nothing an awful lot, aren't you?" Diamond Tiara hissed to Yu. He had been so busy fusing Personas in his mind (a trick he had learned from Igor not too long ago), he hadn't been paying attention to the lesson.

"Keep going," the bully continued, "I'm sure you'll get your Cutie Mark for being a brainless daydreamer soon enough. I'm sure it'll be on your flank annnny second now."

Now.

"So," Yu said slowly, without a trace of emotion of any kind, "you're staring at my flank, then."

The bully froze mid sentence. "What?"

"I'm flattered," he continued, "but I don't think flirting is allowed in school."

Diamond Tiara's face turned red, and Silver Spoon subtly scooted her seat away from her friend to avoid her incoming outburst. "H-How dare you! I wasn't-"

"Miss Cheerilee," Yu said, much louder than he usually spoke, "Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon are staring at my plot. It's making me uncomfortable."

Not even turning around, the Unawake teacher continued writing on her chalkboard. "Miss Tiara, Miss Spoon, could you please stay after class? I need to speak with you about your behavior as of late."

The bullies stuttered in rage and disdain, before finally falling silent and sulking in their seats.

They glared at Yu for the rest of the class. He didn't care at all.

[Nocturne], [Harry Potter]
Naoki vs. Umbridge: Who do YOU think wins?
Author: Gamerex27
Status: NON-CANON(?)

"You will write 'I shall not threaten to summon a horde of demons to raze the Ministry to the ground', one thousand times, Mr. Kashima. You should be thankful that your punishment is so light: if it were up to me, you would be out of this school in a heartbeat."

Naoki Kashima, the school's Japanese transfer into Slytherin house, grumbled in reply. Okay, maybe he *had* overreacted to this bitch of a teacher refusing to actually teach magic (which he was always up for learning, as the next power-up could always be the key that got his friends Looping). But, to be fair, she had it coming: no Looper, not a single one, liked Umbridge.

Now?, asked the Demon Soul residing in the back of his mind.

Naoki brushed him off, and reached for the quill. He sat back down at his seat, and started writing. Or, he tried to. He had forgotten that there was nothing to write *with*.

"Hey, Umbridge?" He refused to give the woman any honoriffics at all. "You have any ink?"

Umbridge twitched at the lack of respect, then put on another one of her patented smug smiles. "The quill is enchanted to supply its own ink, Mr. Kashima."

That set off alarm bells in Naoki's head.

Now?, the True Demon asked impatiently.

No, Naoki replied.

KILL THE BITCH!, said the Fiend. Naoki ignored that one even harder.

He guessed that the quill was cursed somehow, given the residual Magatsuhi his demonic senses picked up on. And since Magatsuhi was extracted directly and painfully from humans, this meant Umbridge was up to some sick, sick things. With a flick of his wrist, the invisible barrier of a Makarnkarn spell sprang into existance.

Naoki started writing. He took special care to write, in English, as neatly and clearly as he possibly could.

Umbridge screamed out in pain, and clutched at her now bleeding hand. "What do you think you're doing, you *filthy Muggleborn?!*"

As she left the chair and stomped across her pink room of horrors, Naoki could clearly see a phrase carved on her hand. It read "Umbitch is a worthless waste of matter and Magatsuhi, and should be thrown in the trash where she belongs."

"*Crucio!"* Umbridge screamed. The curse flew across the room at the Japanese boy.

"Protego," Naoki muttered, with barely contained rage. The curse dissolved against the Shield charm. Naoki pointed his finger accusingly at Umbridge, his arm shining with energy at their standoff.

"Blood magic. *Classy,"* Naoki hissed. "Keeping these kids locked up in ignorance, trying to control every single action anyone takes in this school, and actively *hurting* your students." Naoki's face twisted into a sadistic grin. "Now I don't feel bad about what comes next."

Now? the Demon asked.

"Yeah. Now."

Naoki's Pocket opened, and the room was flooded with blood. Blood as far as the eye could see, from the floor to the ceiling. Blood, filling Umbridge's lungs as she screamed, and ruining every piece of furniture she owned.

And just as suddenly as it had appeared, the blood vanished, without a trace of it ever having been there. Naoki had changed. Gone were his Hogwarts robes and trousers: he was now shirtless, and covered head to toe in glowing red tattoos. A small horn protruded from the back of his neck.

His tattoos faded to blue, and he stood up straight from his crouching position to face his (current) nemesis.

"You," the boy said, with his voice reverbing off of the room's walls, "are *nothing*."

He lazily raised his finger, and Umbridge's wand turned to ashes in her hand. Instantly, Naoki appeared right in front of her, grabbing her by the throat and slamming her up against the wall.

"I have fought gods, led armies, and mastered magics beyond your wildest dreams," he monologued, as Umbridge struggled to breathe. "I have destroyed the universe countless times, and restored it many more. Though I may seem a child to you, I have fought the hosts of heaven and hell-and *won*."

Naoki's face shined with savage glee. "You who would wish to control the lives of others." His skin turned pitch black, and his eyes glowed white with energy. "Know that there are some things that you could never hope to control. *Like me*."

[Devil Survivor 1], [My Little Pony]
Queen of Bel
Author: Gamerex27

"So, what happens in this Loop?" Rarity looked around at the vast city of Tokyo, scowling slightly as that tacky headphones' cord got in her line of sight.

"In a few hours, demons start invading the city like crazy," replied Atsuro, the Anchor of the Lockdown Amala Loop. "People can use these COMPS," he said, holding up a device that looked suspiciously like a Nintendo 3DS, "to summon and control them. Then the military locks down the whole city."

Rarity could take it no longer: she tore those accursed headphones off of her head, dropping them to the ground. "Is there any way to cut this short?" she asked. "I think I felt my sister's Ping, and I want to track her down before she gets into any trouble."

Atsuro grimaced at this. "Then she's probably replacing Naoya-that's the older brother of my buddy you're replacing. He's the reincarnation of Cain, and he made the Summoning Program as part of this gambit to get revenge against God." He removed a drone from his Pocket, tweeting a command to it through his COMP. It flew off, presumably in search of Sweetie. "To stop the lockdown, you have to beat all the Bel demons, and then kill Babel to become the King of Bel. Otherwise, the whole city gets destroyed, since that's the only way to get rid of the lockdown. Well, the *best* way; Yooho gets mad when we take the more unorthodox methods, since they lead to more explosions."

Rarity quirked her (thankfully real this time) eyebrow. "Bels?"

"They're a bunch of demons that were the pieces of this big demon, killed thousands of years ago. They've all got Bel in their name, and whichever one kills all the other Bels can become the King."

Suddenly, Rarity groaned, holding her head in her hands.

"What's wrong?" Atsuro asked.

"I know why I'm here now," Rarity groaned. " It's *another* Gag Loop. My full name is Rarity *Belle*."

The Anchor tried to stifle his laughter, and failed. "Yeah, that would explain it," he said after composing himself. "You're replacing Kazuya, who's the reincarnation of Abel, and since he's a Bel..."

Rarity **Bel**le sighed again, face palming. If only she could Ascend this Loop to just end it now. This was going to become annoying. Especially if she couldn't find anything better to wear than the mind-numbingly plain clothes the Loop saw fit to put her in.

…

Author: GamerA

It was the start of another loop, and Rarity was busy sewing the decorations for the Summer Sun festival. Oh, sometimes she would just pull a set out of her Pocket and get to work on something more interesting, but right now, she happened to be in the mood for simple busywork.

She was snapped out of her trance by the sound of the front door, and began to rattle off her usual welcome as she took in the new arrivals: a familiar seeming local shepherd and some of his flock. "Hello, Welcome to Rarity's boutique – ah, if it isn't Dolly and Sweaters coming by for a visit again. I must admit, I wasn't expecting you at this hour, Mr. Bell."

"Hello, Rarity," "Sweaters" the pinkish sheep said, a sigh audible in her tone. "Dolly," with a more purplish tint, was busy squealing over some of the outfits she had on display, while the fourth sheep, whose distinguishing feature was a simple white hat, was standing at the shepherd's side. The shepherd himself was a navy blue stallion with a black hair and mane, and a cutie-mark of a tower with a bell on top.

"Yes, well, I had something I needed to check up on," "Shepherd's Bell" responded, producing something for her to look at. "First, I wanted to get your advice on this."

Playing along for the moment, Rarity looked at the trinket. "Hmm, I haven't seen one of these in a while. Wood, carved and colored into the shape of a mistletoe decoration, attached to a nylon string. And if I'm not mistaken... it was mistletoe wood to begin with." She looked back up at the stallion. "Normally I'd say it was completely the wrong time of year to be showing this off. But you just wanted to see if I recognized it, didn't you, Abel?"

"Thought of you the minute I Awoke," he confirmed, "Alright. We can all speak freely now."

"Finally..." "Sweaters" relaxed, "It's bad enough being called Sweater girl or Yoohoo. It's worse being named that way."

"Yes Yuzu, I remember," Rarity responded. "Now Abel – I may go on calling you that? - What really brings you here? Your world was a trial, with several tricks Atsuro didn't properly prepare me for – but I have endured worse."

"Might as well. I was just seeing whether absorbing several demons had any permanent effects on you," Abel said, smiling off to the side, "That sort of thing can be dangerous in the wrong circumstances, you know."

"Just a drop in the bucket, I assure you. It did however give me some of my own Loop powers back for the lockdown's duration," Rarity answered, "Enduring our siblings was much worse. I wasn't expecting Sweetie Belle to be an unrelated rock star."

"Well, I didn't know she was a singer!" Atsuro defended himself, "...But I guess I should've remembered. Naoya was my idol on top of everything else, and has some big shoes to fill. If I'd thought for a second, I'd have known he was the same as always."

"How did you deal with everything?" Abel asked, "Atsuro wouldn't tell me that part."

"Well, first I fought Beldr on schedule. then I convinced Remiel to let me fight Jezebel early - no point leaving that priestess at risk. But after that...I got into a heated argument with the border guards," Rarity admitted, "Pointing out that they were making that cult look like heroes in comparison drove some of them over the edge. After that... Things escalated quickly. Fortunately after my brief career as an alicorn lightning rod, everyone was more inclined to match wits instead of blades with me."

"Hmm, Maybe I should try something like that next time."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Pokémon]
Gotta summon ‘em all
Author: unknown (discovered by jxz)

"Ok, this is ridiculous." Aigis, Anti Shadow Weapon, and Persona user said, looking at her... extremities, for lack of a better word. "I get I must be an artificial Pokemon, and Ryoji a Dark-based one... But why Ms. Mitsuru had to be a Lickitung?"

Minato, her "Trainer" for the loop, shrugged. "Have you felt how hard that tounge hits? And Lickitung can learn some Ice moves, so..."

"I get it... But you must explain me why Junpei is an Aipom."

Minato looked at her, a deadpan look in his face. "Do I even have to answer that?" he shook his head. "Now come on, Yu said he'll be in Viridian by tomorrow."

Aigis nodded, and floated alongside her friend. Being a Rotom had some good things, after all.

[Persona 3]
Classic de-railing
Author: Joy22

Minato groaned, the buzzing feeling that signify the start of a new loop finally faded, and he wake up.....strapped.....to a cross?

Ikutsuki was ranting about the Fall and Aigis was pointing her guns at them.

Oh.

He remembers this moment. Ikutsuki was about to sacrifice them to Nyx, he reprogrammed Aigis to restrain SEES to do so.

Fortunately, they managed to reach out to Aigis. But alas, Kirijo Takeharu was killed but not before wounding Ikutsuki, and the madman chose to commit suicide rather than facing Koromaru.

Minato stared at the scene before him, Ikutsuki was still ranting. Good.

He reach deep into his psyche, where myriad of beings swam in the his sea of souls. You see, after a few loop Minato realized, he barely scratched the surface of his Wild Card ability. Yes, even when unlocking the Universe Arcana. On those loop he manages to gain Personas that he didn't knew existed.

He finally found him, and his presence filled Minato's mind.

"Oh shut up, you whiny poof!" Not one of his best insult, but hey, he stopped ranting.

Ikutsuki wondered what gave Minato the gall to insult him, when he had them at his mercy.

"Hercules." Minato muttered, he didn't need Evoker, not anymore.

A massive, muscular arm backhanded Ikutsuki, breaking his nose and knocking his gun out of reach.

A faint 'click' sound reminds him that Aigis haven't overcome his reprogramming. Fearlessly, he reach his hands to her cheek, pulling her to him.... and smashing his lips to hers, tongue exploring her artificial one. Ignoring the gasp of SEES (Takeharu didn't gasp, he's too stoic. But his expression said all) he withdrew, looking at her face.

She was back.

He smiled, putting his lips near her hearing component "Aigis, knee-cap him."

A cry of pain was heard , along with a gunshot . Aigis didn't even bother questioning his action.

Aside from Ikutsuki moaning in pain, the Tartarus was filled with utter silence, which was broken when Koromaru finally arrived, looking confused.

Minato smirked, if only he brought sunglasses and toothpick.....

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Devil Survivor 1]
(no title)
Multiple authors

Author: crankers
Yu called out to all of the other protagonists: Okay, new game. What is the stupidest anthropomorphic personification you have ever fought?

Author: Zap Rowsdower
A man in Demonica armor raised his hand.

"When I was invading the Schwartzvelt, I had to fight Kanbari, Japanese God of Toilets. He wanted revenge against my crew for the poor treatment we were giving to our on-board lavatory."

Author: Gamerex27
Naoki sighed, leaning back in his seat. "I thought it was a normal baseline run at first. You know, see the whole world get blown up, see all my (human) friends die horribly, fight angels and demons for the umpteenth time."

He took a sip of saki, wincing at the taste. "And then I found out that, instead of Japan, we were all in *Rapan.* As in, the music. Figures, since my Loop has some weird *thing* with music. I hate to admit it, but that...singing power I nabbed from the ponies actually helped out a lot. Instead of your usual, fun fights, I had to engage all the demons I fought in dance-offs and rock battles."

"Hey, wasn't the sun in your Loop shaped like..." Yosuke started.

"Yeah, Kagatsuchi looks like a disco ball. So, rather than literally beating the living shit out of him, like I usually do, I had to challenge...urgh...*High-No Rapgasuchi, Rapanese god of The Beat,* to a rap battle." Naoki poured himself more booze. "Now, if you excuse me, I have to drown out the True Demon. No, it was not *funny*: it was annoying. Stop laughing."

Author: jxz
Minato sighed. "I was Awakining in the end of my normal loop. You know, dying, then becoming the Seal... I Awoke afer fighting Ryoji."

"And?" Yu asked.

"Let me finish. As I was saying, I Awoke after fighting Ryoji, he takes flight... And a big bowl of spaghetti with meatballs came down the sky."

All the Wild Card's eyes' opened wide. "You surely don't mean-"

"Yes... Nyx was the sister of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. And no, I'm not even sure how that was even possible."

"Though she was delicious." Aegis said. At the odd looks, she replied. "Hey, I was a cyborg that loop. I could eat, ok?"

Author: Gamerex27
Kazuya-or, as he was sometimes called, Abel-pushed the pause button on his phone's music app. "You know how I always end up fighting the Bel demons? Sometimes they're replaced by other stuff with -Bel in their names."

"The fifth day of the lockdown, I didn't fight Belial-I fought the personification of Mexican Peppers and Spices in a Tortiella Shell."

The room was silent for a moment.

"Wait," Chie said, "so it was... a giant taco?"

"Yep," Kazyua confirmed. "I figured out how to summon it by fusion the next day, and guess what it was? It was called Taco **Bel**l."

Groans sounded from throughout the room, as humans, demons, robots, and all combinations of the above fully grasped the implications of this terrible pun.

"Why the hell does Yggdrasil keep doing this shit?" Kanji asked,a scowl on his face. "Like, last Loop, I was just a floating kanji symbol-as in, the alphabet. And *no one friggin' noticed!*"

"I guess," Yu said, a smirk on his face, "it just likes bad puns."

[SMT IV]
Samurai vs. The Loot Generator
Author: Gamerex27

In the Traveller's Bag, you find:

- a scroll titled "What It's Like to Be a Sorcerer"
  • a time-infused glaive of undeath
  • a plain robe made out of rapiers
  • a mind-banishing tower shield of the ghost
  • a dusty grilled pheasant
  • a voodoo monocle of deceit
  • a wind-eating ruby of kings
  • a potion of fire
  • a pile of 398 assorted coins of gold and platinum

Isabeau lifted the sharp, metal robe into the air, tilting her head slightly. "How...would one wear this?" she wondered. "It's quite simple, Master," Burroughs said. "You just need to put it on. Of course, you'd probably die from doing it, but at least you *can* wear it!"

At his fellow Samurai's side, Flynn brought the gemstone close to his face, inspecting it. "Hm. It appears as though this artifact nullifies Force based spells. This will be useful, especially if *someone* tries to kill me again."

The Anchor glared at him. "And had I *not* killed you in those Variants, you would have murdered everyone in Tokyo with a black hole, or torn Mikado to shreds just to spite Merkabah. I refuse to let the Baselines of those Variants come to pass, as they lead to the senseless massacre of innocents."

Ignoring his companions, the Unawake Walter lifted the grilled meat into the air. "Who leaves perfectly good food in the middle of a dusty dungeon?"

His fellow Sleeping Samurai prodded at the eldritch polearm with his sword. "Among all of this strange treasure, food is your main concern?" Jonathan reached down to grab the spear, but decided against it. "I doubt that touching this artifact would lead to anything good. Perhaps I'll just let one of my demons hold it."

…

Author: inc1013

"I cannot help but feel that Masakado is trying to deliver a message to us." Isabeau stated.

"Perhaps that thrice damned tree is making yet another pun." Flynn responded as he watched one of his non-looping compatriots rock back and forth in the fetal position.

"The Megami says she has Recarm. DEAD!!! The Lady says she has Magakarn. Hehe...dead. Dead in four; death is four. Nothing matters child, I drink your tears as they taste of defeat. It is a rich sweet liquor you see. I drink all your tears. A deer, a skeleton, the death bells, It matters not how death comes. The shots and shield will not save you this time around child. Your breaking of the torture breaks my fun.

"Weep now, and weep eternal for you shall taste the muck. I enjoy your misery good child and it is a boon to damn your luck. Weep for the patient which you fail to cure, and weep for the township, which cannot endure! Weep for your allies as you see them fall... And weep for yourself, as you fail them al-."

Walter would have continued had Flynn not cast Dormina.

Ignoring his unconscious compatriot--as well as avoiding the divine looking set of maps that Walter had touched before his bout of insanity--Jonathan sifted further through the ashes of the once mighty demon.

"How is it that this spear remains moist?" Asked the Luxuror.

…

Here's what they found
In the Demon's corpse ashes, you find...
• a wet longspear
• a dull sapphire of dawn
• a holy atlas of misery
• a polished pair of mittens

• a mirrored amulet of the labradorite golem
• a vial of void
• a pile of 122 assorted coins of copper and silver

[Nocturne], [Pokémon]
Pokemon Mystery Demons
Author: Gamerex27

Naoki Kashima Awoke lying on his back. And immediately sighed in relief, because instead of the city of Tokyo, he saw a forest.

"*Good*." He got to his feet, and stretched, yawning as his back cracked. Even though he had gotten over his...problems..., going through the Apocalypse over and over again wore him out, even if he had the chance to restore the world to normal at the end (for one day, before the Loop started again).

"Morning, Squirtle. Hey, do you want to try using that Ghost Trap on Gengar this..." the approaching salamander-esque creature trailed off mid sentence. "Annnnnnd he's not here. You're an Anchor, then?"

"Wait, you're a-" Naoki chuckled. "Pokemon. You know, back when I was a kid... I always wanted to be a Trainer. To be in Pokemon. To be a hero in another world, hanging out with all of these fantastical creatures and fighting evil. Back before all of the stuff I went through in my baseline, and reality bashed my head in with a 2x4. Which game is this? Red and Green? Crystal? Emerald?"

"Uh...none of those, unless this is another post-apocaliptic Variant. Have you...noticed you're a Pokemon too?"

Blinking, the usually-a-demon looked down, and realized that the Charmander was right. Blades instead of hands, two-toed feet, and covered on more blades near his head and chest...

"Pawniard, right?" Naoki looked at his currently-dull foreblade. "Gen 5 was never released in my baseline, so I only ever got to play it once, in the Hub."

"Well, it's nice to meet you. I'm Charmander." The Fire Type stuck his paw out in greeting.

Raising a hairless eyebrow, Naoki stared at the other Pokemon's paw for a moment. Slowly, he placed his blade in Charmander's paw. "I don't think shaking is a good idea, since, well, I'd probably cut your paw off by accident. Naoki Kashima, from the Amala Loops."

"So," he said, looking around, "what's there to do here? I take it the world is in danger, and only I can save it?"

"Uh, sort of. We do need to save the world, but we always help Squirtle do it. We could just fly up to Rayquaza early and fix the natural disasters before they get started."

"Nah, I think I'll do the baseline for once. Last time I took a Loop off the rails, I ended up in Eiken."

•••

"Don't worry, Pichu! We'll get your brother back, safe and sound!"

"How the hell do you..." Naoki muttered, oblivious to the conversation in Town Square. Currently, he was struggling to tie the Pecha Scarf Kangeskhan had given them somewhere on his body, while not slicing it to ribbons with his handblades.

"Need any help with that?" Charmander whispered.

"No, no, I can do this." Swearing under his breath, the Pawniard tried again and again to tie down the Pecha scarf, only to poke hole after hole in it by accident.

"Team Go-Getters, is on the-"

"Not so fast!" From seemingly nowhere, Ekans appeared and shoved Chikorita out of the way, with Medicham and Gengar close behind.

"These chumps wouldn't know how to rescue a Pokemon out of a paper bag!" Gengar said, smirking. "Team Meanies will take care of this! We'll get your-"

"Wait."

Freezing, the Ghost Pokemon slowly turned around to face whichever idiot had interrupted his speech, followed by everyone else in the Square. "What?!" he hissed.

"Can...can you say your team's name again?" Naoki asked, his face twitching, and his Pecha Scarf falling to the floor, as he tried to process what he had heard.

"Pay attention next time, squirt! We're Team Meanies, the best Rescue Team around!" Medicham said boastfully.

"Right. Hang on a second; I'll be right back." Still twitching, Naoki walked out of the square, and went out of sight behind a nearby tree.

"AhHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH! REALLY? Team MEANIES*?! TEAM MEANIES?! What the fu-HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!"*

He carried on for about a minute. The Pokemon in the square traded a few confused glances, and Gengar's smirk slowly faded, and was replaced by a furious frown.

Another minute later, Naoki finally walked back into the square, still chuckling. "*Okay....*Okay. That was hilarious. Now, what's your *real* team name?"

"W-we told you, you imbicile!" Gengar sputtered. "We're *Team Meanies,* and there's *nothing funny about that!*"

For a moment, the square was silent. Then, Naoki broke down laughing again, beating his blades against the ground.

"S-Shut up!" Medicham kicked the little brat, but this didn't stop him: he simply kept on laughing and laughing, at their expense.

"R-R-Really?" Naoki said as he got up, wiping tears from his eyes with the tip of his blade. "Team *Meanies?* That was the *best* you could think of for a team name? *That's* the name that will strike terror into the hearts of feral Pokemon? *That's* the name you think the Pokemon of this town will cheer when you save Pokemon?"

"What, were you pressed for a deadline?" he asked mockingly. "Did you procrastinate before the deadline for your forms were due, and you just picked the first name you thought of? And you picked a name that *blatantly says* that you're evil? Were "Team Skull," or "Team Murder," or "Team Bond Villains" taken?"

"Do any of you really think," the boy added, whirling around to face the befuddled gaggle of concerned Pokemon, "that hiring a team of losers who outright admit that they're evil in their *names* will lead to *anything* good? Can you *really* put your faith in these clowns? Hire them to find a lost little boy? For all you know, they'll just put him up for ransom the second they find him, and then *eat him* once you pay up!"

No one spoke for a few seconds after the stranger's rant. Eventually, Whiscash found his voice.

"Regardless of your personal opinions, Pawniard, there's no reason to deny Team Meanies the chance to help out with this mission," the elderly Pokemon said, with a tinge of...something to his tone. "If they want to, they can help find Pikachu."

"Fine," the Dark/Steel type snarled, "but ask yourselves this. If they *attack* other teams in *broad daylight...what will they do when no one's looking?*"

With that, Naoki turned around, and walked out of the square. Exchanging a glance, Chikorita and Charmander hurried after him.

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"That was uncalled for," Chikorita told him, barely keeping the anger out of her voice.

"Really?" Naoki leaned back, dropping the whitstone he was using to sharpen his blades. "They outright call themselves-*snerk*- Meanies. And the way they act, there's no way they're not evil in the end. Why not nip the problem in the bud by turning the whole town against them? It's not like they can *change*: they're not even Looping!"

"Because they didn't do anything wrong yet," the Grass-Type growled. "And besides, what you did back in the Square was just rude, and it made us look bad in front of the whole town!"

"And they're not *really* that bad," Charmander added, absentmindedly inspecting the berries Auntie Khangeskhan had given them. "I mean, Gengar even buries the hatchet with Squirtle in Baseline. With how that works out," he added, "we wouldn't be surprised if he started Looping!"

"Okay, if they aren't *so bad*, why are they creeping up on us right now?"

Without even looking, Chikorita stamped her paw on the ground, causing a massive wall of thorns to spring up in Team Meanies's path. "Just because they're jerks now," she said, over the yelps of pain inflicted by the various thorns and brambles the villains ran into head-on, "doesn't mean they can't change for the better! Pokemon aren't static, Naoki!"

'Look," Charmander started, "I didn't want to bring this up...but Pikachu told us about you. About what happened when you Looped into Equestria for the first time. About what happened when you hit your nadir."

"If you're worried about me going berserk again," the demon muttered, "don't. I've already gotten over that, and I've dealt with my Shadow. It won't happen again."

"Still," Chikorita said, "being cynical about everything will get you nowhere! Just...give them a chance! At least *try* to see if they can't be redeemed. To see that, just this once, we can change things for the better-without resorting to hate or violence."

The Demi-Fiend was silent for a moment.

"Fine," he said, crossing his arms, "but if you're wrong, I'll kill that asshole myself."

[Devil Survivor 2], [Naruto]
Should have taken the train
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

An eerie atmosphere hung over the ruined subway stop as three teens awoke from their near death experience, two of them male and the third female. One boy had blonde hair with ocean blue eyes, the second had black hair with a dull expression masking sharp eyes and the female navy blue hair with a melancholy expression behind her nearly colorless retina. Only minutes prior, they had narrowly avoided being crushed under the derailed D line from Osaka to Tokyo. The black haired boy groaned an muttered, "Of course we'd be thrown into, once again, another life and death loop with the fate of the world on the line."

The blonde gave the black haired youth a sideways glance, "I don't recognize this loop. Shikamaru, keep your eyes open. Anything could happen."

The girl blinked, "From what I can remember...we died."

Naruto groaned, "Don't tell me we're ghosts again. I'd really rather not experience another four millennia trapped in another tomb like Korriban."

The three teens felt themselves and looked around. Shikamaru looked down at his clothes, reaching into his pockets and pulling out a cell phone, "High school outfit, orange cell phone, and my memories tell me I was crushed under the subway over there...Hinata, Byakugan, check for survivors and start healing as many as you can. Naruto, lots of clones and transform them into rescue workers."

Hinata nodded and Naruto muttered, "Not like I haven't done stuff like this for a million or so loops."

Even with his complaining, Naruto complied and began pulling out survivors and dragging them over to Hinata. As for Hinata, she worked like a machine, dividing her attention perfectly between applying her medical skills to heal survivors and scanning for those still breathing. Shikamaru, meanwhile, opened his cell phone while continuing to study his memories. His hands danced across the number pad, assimilating information on his unawake life. And then he reached the Nicaea app and reviews his death clip once again. Frowning, his search continues only for him to stop immediately, "Oy, Oy, what is this? This app wasn't on here before."

The Demon Summoning program, even now the app was downloading something. He shouted, "Naruto, Hinata, check your phones. See if you have any apps that weren't there before."

The original Naruto paused and pulled out his phone, thumbing through the programs before landing on one, "Hmm...looks like we're in Flynn's universe."

Hinata quickly applied the shadow clone jutsu along with a transformation to continue her work while checking her phone. Despite her unease at being in this universe, her mouth unconsciously shifted into a grin, remembering a time where she was Isabeau. Naruto quickly explained they were in the Shin Megami Tensei universe, though he didn't recognize which branch he was in. But the questions ended abruptly when a pink light filled the dark and ruined station. Naruto stepped back towards Shikamaru as the boy muttered, "That can't be good."

Several wolf like creatures appeared and started making for the ruined train, searching for any survivors. The black haired boy cursed and held his phone up to his face. His download was at 20 percent. Since only 5 or so minutes have passed, it would be another 20 minutes before the program would activate. His hand drew a smoke grenade from his subspace pocket and threw it towards the subway and shouted, "Hinata, switch!"

With the staccato sound of footsteps rumbling, Shikamaru and Hinata's clone traded spots seamlessly as the explosive released its pitch black contents and further obscured the subway. Those humans still able to move fled up the escalator, leaving Naruto, Hinata and Shikamaru behind with the unconscious survivors and the recently dead. Hinata and her clone entered the smoke a moment later and soon flashes of cyan light accompanied by snapping noises managed to escape the smoke cloud signifying Jyuken. The Nara pushed his medical chakra into the man Hinata had just been healing, quickly stabilizing the man before his condition could deteriorate from the sudden lack of chakra influx. Naruto tapped several buttons on his phone, before pouting, "My download hasn't even reached 1 percent yet."

Soon, the sounds of flashes of battle ceased, followed by a quick crunching noise and Hinata emerged from the smoke screen. Shikamaru nodded as he finished healing the man. With a quick sweep, Hinata confirmed no more survivors were in the station, and the three dragged as many survivors as they could to the surface. Upon exiting the station, they were issued forth by men in black uniforms and lead to the nearest disaster shelter by Japanese relief workers gathered behind them. Hinata turned to Naruto and asked, "You want to sit this one out?"

Naruto shook his head, "I'm going to help the relief workers, how about you?"

Shikamaru sighed, "You're one troublesome anchor, but I'll help at the shelter, distribute food, water and blankets."

Naruto snorted but nodded in approval. Hinata, of course, volunteered to go with Naruto, and the two took off shortly with the relief workers. Shikamaru created a shadow clone and went to take a nap in the nearby corner.

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – part 1
Author: Gamerex27

As always, the citizens of Ponyville awoke to a beautiful sunrise, providing just enough heat to be pleasantly warm, but not scorchingly uncomfortable.

Princess Celestia yawned as she put the sun in its place for the day, her stomach rumbling in protest due to the lack of breakfast consumed recently.

However, as she turned around to go to the dining room, she paused. Today was the day, wasn't it? Luna couldn't be stopped forever: and the stars were right. She would escape the moon today-or, if not today, soon.

She knew that she could not defeat her sister single-hoofedly: while they usually evenly matched, whatever had driven Luna mad had boosted her magic to far stronger heights.

"There's only one option, then," she muttered, forcing herself to avert her gaze from the barely visible moon, and walked down the stairs. "I have to send Twilight to gather the Elements. As much as I don't want to put her in danger, we don't have a choice."

But as she said this, taking a seat at her table, she realized that the Mare in the Moon's impending escape wasn't the sole contributor to her nerves. Something else felt...off. A sense of foreboding washed over her, as it a disaster far, far worse than the return of her mad sister was approaching.

She couldn't explain it, really. Her mane had become frazzled slightly, as if she had had a terrible shock. She became acutely aware of a loud thumping sound. An assassin, sent by her sister to get her out of the way before she returned to enslave her little ponies?

No, wait. That was just her heartbeat.

"Is something wrong, Princess?" one of her attendants asked.

Blinking, Celestia realized that she had been just sitting there for quite some time, not even touching the pancakes the cook went to aches and pains to make for her. No doubt that they had grown cold by now.

"No, nothing's wrong," she lied, knowing that she had to keep up appearances in order to avoid scaring her subjects by being too solemn. "It's just...a bit cold in here."

Her horn glowed, and the temperature of the room rose by several degrees. But, no matter how warm she made the room, she could not stop the chills running through her spine.

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Fluttershy Awoke right as Twilight Sparkle approached, clipboard held up by a telepathy spell. Sending out a quick Ping and subsequent Element check, she noted that Twilight didn't seem to be Awake this time. All three Honesties (including Nyx, judging by the fact that all of the Ping responses came from within Equis's atmosphere, and not from the Moon) and one of every other Element (including herself), but Twilight herself did not respond to a Ping from right in front of her.

"Are you the pony who's managing the music for the festival tonight?" the Unawake Element of Magic asked. She seemed disinterested, a bit more so than she had been in baseline.

"Oh, yes," Fluttershy nodded, her stutter long gone thanks to millennia of speech therapy. "One moment, please." She gestured with one forehoof to her various bird friends perched nearby, and they began to chirp and sing in perfect harmony.

While the song was beautiful, Fluttershy had heard it a million times, and her thoughts turned to other matters. Obviously, there had to be a foreign Anchor present, though he or she wasn't Awake yet. She knew the signs to look for by now: eyes far older than they should be, powers that were not natural to Equestria, perhaps a different gait or walk, and so on.

"...right. Thanks." Twilight said, breaking Fluttershy out of her thoughts.

"I'm Fluttershy, by the way," she introduced herself. Just because Twilight wasn't Awake this time, doesn't give her an excuse to be rude, after all. "Are you leaving already? I was planning on going to the market to stock up on some more birdseed. Maybe we could walk there together?"

"Twilight Sparkle," the unicorn replied, "and sorry, but no. I have to make sure that the other preparations for the festival are going as planned."

"Oh, alright," the Element of Kindness replied. "I suppose that I'll see you at the festival, then."

Twilight nodded, still seeming a bit out of it, as if she were pre-occupied thinking of some important matter. She walked away, and Fluttershy headed in the opposite direction towards the market.

Several minutes later, she had found the appropriate stall, and grabbed a bag of bits from her saddlebag. Taking the bag of birdseed in her mouth, she began walking back towards her house-

-And was promptly bowled over by something ramming into her side. Shrieking, she fell to the ground, the bag of seeds spilling all over the road.

"Uh, sorry about that," a colt's voice replied.

Fluttershy pushed herself to her hooves, and saw a young, black-coated unicorn colt, with a Cutie Mark in the shape of a treble clef.

"It's alright," Fluttershy replied, her normally soft voice even further muffled by a few seeds that had found their way into her mouth in the spill. Spitting them out, she took another look at the colt. "You're...Trouble Clef, right?"

The colt smiled apologetically, his horn starting to glow. "Yeah. Sorry about that, Miss," he said, levitating large clumps of birdseed back into Fluttershy's bag. "I was meeting up with some of my friends-we were going to go have lunch before the festival later-and I'm running late. Again, sorry I headbutted you. At least I didn't end up impaling you by accident," he said, pointing to his horn with one hoof.

Given how pretty much all the local Loopers knew each and every single pony living in Ponyville by this point, Fluttershy realized that this must be someone from another Loop. An Unawake Anchor, perhaps?

"Thanks for the help cleaning this up," she said, placing a hoof on his shoulder. "It was nice meeting you."

"Yeah," Trouble Clef replied, "you too, Miss-"

And the colt blinked, Awakening in the span of a split second. His eyes quickly widened, then narrowed in pure rage.

"Don't touch me," he growled.

Fluttershy blinked. "Hm?"

The Anchor violently pushed her away with his forehoof, trembling in anger. "I said," he roared, "*don't touch me, you yellow, soulless bitch!"*

Before any of the other ponies in the square could react to this sudden 180 in personality this young colt had done, he dragged a writhing worm out of nowhere, and promptly swallowed it. Hissing in pain, his body began to warp and contort itself. Eldritch, glowing lines appeared all over his coat, glowing in an otherworldly fashion. His horn shuddered, then drifted across his head like a leaf across water, settling on the back of his neck. And, impossibly, his own Cutie Mark *shifted,* changing from a musical staff note to a chain wrapped in the symbol of infinity, shattering to pieces.

His eyes glowed pure white, and shot out twin laser beams, hitting Fluttershy square in the face and sending her flying far, far away.

As the furious stallion gave chase, Fluttershy took the opportunity to shapeshift into a phoenix, quickly flapping her larger wings to slow her descent and avoid a fatal drop. "Wait!" she squawked. "Are you-"

"SHUT UP!" The foreign Looper shot out more eye beams, his target narrowly avoiding each attack. Quickly, Fluttershy realized that she had to lure this colt to somewhere out of the way, if she wanted to avoid the destruction and devastation a fight between Loopers could escalate to.

"Please," she begged, slowly making her way to the Everfree Forest in between barrel rolls and ducks to avoid the eye lasers, "stop it! This is a Sanctuary Loop, you don't have to-"

'Shut up, shut up, JUST SHUT UP!" the Anchor howled, his entire body starting to glow with raw power.

A blast of pure, almighty power erupted from his mouth, nearly blowing Fluttershy to smithereens. The shockwave of the blast sent her tumbling into the Everfree, shapeshifting back into her normal body by reflex.

"You want to get out *alive?"* The boy hissed. "Then tell me where Celestia is."

"What?"

"Tell me where your *precious princess is"* the stranger hissed, "so I can choke that genocidal tyrant *to death with her own lungs!*"

Fluttershy's heart sank. The violent outburst, the hatred towards Celestia...it could only mean one thing.

Before the other Looper could continue his rant, Fluttershy stamped her forehooves on the ground, sending a mass of tree roots in the shape of a fist right at the stranger's jaw. Too distracted by rage to react, he went down like a falling brick, slamming into the ground. As he leapt to his hooves, Fluttershy sent out the one thing that she hoped could non-violently stop him. A Ping.

The demonic colt froze at the magical pulse of energy. Fluttershy repeated the signal, and received a reply from mere feet in front of her.

"I...*what?!*" The pure hatred on the boy's face shifted to sheer confusion. "But if you're-and this isn't Earth-and I was *always* like this-then what the fu-"

"Please calm down!" Fluttershy asked, raising her voice far more than she was used to, in order to get through to him. "The first time we met-when I wasn't Awake, I guess- what happened?"

The colt stared at her, face still reflecting his complete disbelief of what was going on. Eventually, after many seconds of silence, he flopped down onto his haunches, sighing.

"So," he grumbled, "that *wasn't* you."

He forced himself to meet Fluttershy's gaze. "The first time I saw you...*ponies*..., was some weird variant where your planet just teleported in out of nowhere. This force field extended from the planet, and your...*Princess"* he spat, "had the bright idea of turning every human being alive into ponies to save their lives."

"But what she *didn't* tell us," he continued, "was that the damn serum erases your soul when you take it. She *knew* that she'd be murdering billions of people, and leaving them as soulless husks, *empty shells*-and she did it anyways."

"The Bureau," Fluttershy confirmed, a rare edge slipping into her voice. "I'm sorry. I'm so, *so* sorry. That's a Variant Loop-one we all hate-and it's never like this in our real world. The real Celestia is nothing like that."

His gaze softened slightly, but he didn't seem any less angry. "Maybe that's true," he said, "maybe not. All I know is, that once we found out the truth, she started bombing cities *en masse* with that potion, wiping out entire populations. I tried to stop her-not easy when all my usual powers were sealed by that Loop-and you and your *friends* caught me."

He made to rub his temples with his hooves, then stopped when he realized that he didn't have any fingers to do so. "You held me down, and you, personally, forced that crap down my throat." Then, he smirked. "'Course, none of you figured out that the serum can only destroy one soul...and, by getting rid of me, you let the demon sharing my body free to go. I think you can tell what happened from there. According to him, mass murder, stalking all of you down like a serial killer, making a deal with that weird chimera to burn your world to the ground..."

Fluttershy frowned. Clearly, his experiences with the Bureau had left an impact on him. It's likely that he didn't trust a single pony on this planet, given the bastardizations of ponykind he had encountered as his first contact with them. "Hey," she said, "this is a Sanctuary Loop. We can help you if you want, Mr-"

"Naoki Kashima," he said, "and *no*. Even if you really, actually mean it, no." He sighed. "Look, don't take this the wrong way, but every time I see those other ponies in my Loop memories-every time I look at *you*-They're the same faces that smiled as they murdered me and my friends. That wanted to kill off everyone I knew, just because your *Princess* said so. I-I need some time alone. To get away from all the ponies around here. I don't *mean* to be racist or anything but-" he sighed again, "-I don't think I'll be able to stop myself from lashing out. Especially since the demon is *still* clamoring for me to kill you all. He can't do anything unless I let him, but it's annoying. And I get *violent* when I'm annoyed."

"Oh, alright." Inwardly, Fluttershy groaned. She *wanted* to help the poor child-she really *did*-but they had all agreed long ago, back when they first declared Equestria to be a Sanctuary Loop, that they would leave troubled Loopers alone if they didn't want their help. It was a matter of time before they ran into someone who *didn't* want their help, given how big and varies the branches of Yggdrasil were. "You know, the Moon is pretty quiet. And, since Nyx is Awake and in town right now, there shouldn't be anypony up there."

"Any*one* up there," he corrected, "but thanks. I-I don't know if I'll be coming back down this Loop. I think I'm going to sleep through this one, especially since I really can't even look at *myself* without feeling sick."

Without even saying goodbye, he floated into the air, then rocketed off, easily reaching escape velocity despite his lack of wings.

Fluttershy kept her eyes on Naoki's fading figure, until he faded into the horizon. She hadn't mentioned it, but something just felt *wrong* with this Loop. Like something horrible was going to happen, and there was nothing they could do to stop it. It was the same feeling she had felt back in Lemon Rush's Loop the first time she was there. And yes, she *had* pushed past it and saved that world, but this time, there really *was* nothing she could do.

Her druidic instincts were never wrong, though. If something was going down, she had a duty to warn the other Loopers, so that they could prepare for anything. Forcing her fears down, she took to the air, to find her friends and try-in vain-to enjoy the Festival.

Miscellaneous part 3 & Naoki loses it - Parts 2 to 6

[MegaTen], [Doctor Who]
Jack Harness beats off Mara
Author: Gamerex27

The Doctor dropped his sonic screwdriver, numbly staring at the space where that green...*thing* once was.

"What...*what the hell was that?!*" Rose said, blushing crimson at the sight that had just, mercifully, been banished from his TARDIS.

"Some kind of creature spawned by humanity's collective unconsciousness," he replied, after taking a moment to calm himself. "Like those imps and succubi we saw outside, before. A *lust* based one, probably."

"That," Jack Harkness said, zipping up his trousers, "was Mara, the demon lady of temptation. And one of my exes, too."

"Somehow, I'm not surprised," the Doctor muttered, massaging his aching temples. "Did you *have* to start flirting with it, again? It didn't seem to happy to see you, even before you started punching it."

"Oh, you know," he replied, turning to face them with a sheepish grin plastered on his face. "Last time we saw each other, she tried to sell me out to the Time Agents again for sex, so I had to pay her back."

"Well, take it *outside* the TARDIS next time!" Furiously, the Doctor stripped off his leather jacket, throwing it on the TARDIS console's nearby chair. "Do you have any *idea* how hard it is to dry clean that? And the TARDIS's laundry machine doesn't work well with blood!"

"Couldn't...you just drop it off at a dry cleaner, and take the TARDIS to the next day?" Rose said, still gaping at the space where the demon once was.

"Oh, Rose, you know how hard precision steering is with the old girl," he replied. "And since she drained all the TARDIS's energy, we're stuck here in this time for a few days!"

"Ah." Rose was *still* staring at the space where Mara had been. "I-I think I'm going to get some chips," she finally said. "I need to get out of here for a bit."

"Bring some back for me!" Jack asked as Rose ran out of the TARDIS.

Once she was gone, the Doctor turned to face the immortal captain again, fury on his face. "Look, just 'cause you're Looping now, doesn't mean you can just do what you like!"

The former Time Agent just shrugged at this. "Look, I just got back from dealing with the Three Families *again* last Loop, alright? I needed to *unwind* somehow!"

"Well, take it *outside* of my TARDIS next time!" the Doctor. "I won't have you and a giant green..." he waved his arms, "*thing,* snogging and hitting each other in my ship!"

"Alright, alright, fine." Jack walked towards the TARDIS doors, then stopped. "You want to get a drink after this? Once we've closed that door to Hell, anyways."

"Fine. God knows I need it, after all this."

[Persona 4]
Magical Mystery Murder!
Author: inc1013

"... Adachi can't be the killer this time."

Yu looked at his friend with a raised eyebrow. It was as if his friend suggested that their looping universe wasn't a setting created by sadistic game developers.

"Oh?"

"Yeah... I remember now... This time Adachi received a concussion from some biker thug and was sent to the hospital. He was in bad shape... TBI,Traumatic Brain Injury. He went into a coma for about three weeks ... specifically the three weeks in which Mayumi Yamano and Saki-Senpai were killed."

Yu looked into the distance. That was a solid Alibi... Adachi was innocent this loop. That only left three other notable suspects. Narutame and the Dojimas. Narutame was off the list because... well he confessed to everything he did. That left the Dojimas. And Ryotaro was off on business this loop during those periods at which point he left... *Oh Masakado...*

"I can't believe this."

"What partner?"

"The Killer is Nanako."

Yosuke looked at his fellow looper as if he just suggested that ascension was a good idea. "Er... Partner... Did you just suggest that Nanako killed them? Do... Do you need to visit Equestria aga-"

"I'M NOT INSANE!"

Yosuke was taken aback.

"Nanako is the only sensible choice, she's the only one without an alibi."

"...Then lets ask her... but I really don't think-"

…

"You jut couldn't quit while you were ahead. Could you... big bro" said Nanako with a grin not too dissimilar from Lucifer's.

"Your kidding me..." though the members of the investigation team.

"Why did you do it Nanako... you were so sweet... why did you do it?" asked Yu with concern in his voice.

"Oh big brother... you know how much I love watching Magical Detective Loveline... and what's a detective story without MURDERS?!" YAAAY!

"Alright so... do we fight with our personas or-"

"What the hell is a 'Persona'"

"...Well this'll be easy."

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

As he touched down on the moon, Naoki dug into his Pocket to find something to help him breathe in space. As much as he wanted to off himself to get the hell out of this place, A: Suffocation is a painful way to go, and B: It would just lead to an even worse Loop later on.

"Ow! Damnit!" he swore, as he withdrew a broken glass vial. "Friggin' hooves," he growled. "Hate these things."

He took another look at the vial. Given how the label was already smeared with blood, there was no way to tell what it was. Ah, well. Probably a pathogen of some kind that Isabeau had been experimenting with, during her "modern technophilia" phase. Given how the Magatama made him immune to most diseases, it was probably nothing to worry about.

Chucking the vial behind him, he draped the amulet around his neck, ensuring that the air bubble it had been emitting since he retrieved it from his Pocket would remain stable.

"Right. Sleep." He lied down, and closed his eyes. But, as much as he tried, he couldn't seem to fall asleep. He was just so *angry*-angry with the ponies for how they had tried to kill humanity, like so many before them. Angry at *that bitch*-no, not her. At her other self. He mentally labeled the other Looper as "Yellow", to stop himself from associating them with those soulless puppets of Celestia, followed by her other gaggle of friends.

And, most of all, he was angry with himself. Angry that he had lashed out when he really didn't need to. Angry that he had, once again, he had just exiled himself from the world, even though, unlike his baseline, he didn't *have* to be alone.

And angry that, even after a million million years of life, he *still* was alone in his Baseline. Aside from Pixie and the Horsemen (the latter of whom were barely there due to bouncing around the Amala branches), he was the only Looper from his baseline, no matter what he

tried to get Chiaki, Isamu, Yuko, or *anyone, anyone at all*-to join him. Even with the common Fused Loops with everyone else in the Amala branch, he still had to sit through the same Apocalypse, over and over again. He still was forced to kill his friends, over and over again. No matter what he tried, no matter how hard he pleaded and threatened them to just sit down and avoid getting into the war for the Reasons, fate was always against him. Either they died horribly, or went mad and hungry with power, and he was forced to put them down, like rabid dogs.

"*Why bother?"* The Demon inside him asked. "*If they are too weak to break the bonds of fate and grow, then they have no place in this infinite Expanse of time. If it companionship you desire, you simply need look towards demonkind."*

"That's not it," Naoki replied. "They're my *friends*. I've known them ever since I was a little kid. Isamu was always my best friend, and Chiaki-" he stopped for a moment. "I liked her. Maybe even loved her. And Yuko was always a huge role model to me. Always loved teachers." He shifted in place. "Do you have *any* idea what it's like? Do you *know* how it feels, to have to kill your friends *over and over and fucking over?!*"

For a moment, his "companion" was silent.

"*Yes,"* he finally answered, "*yes, I do. Though I have no need for friends, we are one. I have seen your grief, your rage, your sorrow. And, while I could care less about them, if you destroy yourself with this anguish, you shall take our entire world with it. And, for the sake of my master and your own* friends, *I cannot let this happen."*

Before Naoki could reply, a foreign voice interrupted their conversation."Who are you*?,"* the stranger boomed. *"*Why are you here?*!"*

Growling again, Naoki forced himself to his hoov-*feet*-, and looked around for whichever *asshole* had interrupted his nap.

He finally saw the source of this interruption: a massive winged unicorn, decked from head to tail in armor. Her slitted eyes narrowed in suspicion, and her horn blazed with light.

"I'm here to crash for a bit," he said, feeling *very* annoyed at this interruption. "The hell do you want?"

"Who *are* you?!" the strange mar-*woman*-repeated.

"Told you," he snarled back, "I just want to sleep. Leave me alone. Now."

"Liar," she hissed. "Nopony is strong enough to enter my domain under their own power. Unless..."

Dark magic flared up around her entire body. "You were sent here by my wretched *sister.* No doubt to kill me, and ensure that my beautiful night would be forgotten forever!"

"The hell are you talking about?!" The Demifiend stepped towards the Mare in the Moon, growling in rage. "Get out of my sight, *now!*"

"You DARE threaten ME?!" Nightmare Moon boomed. "You will *pay* for your insolence!"

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"-And then he tried to pluck out one of my feathers as a *quill!*" Gilda finished her story to her audience. "But the idiot forgot to actually hold me down, so I bucked him in the face and tied him down with the Brush until the police came."

Her story earned another fit of laughter from Rainbow Dash, as they neared the snack table of the festival. "Reminds me of the time where I replaced Hedwig in Hogwarts. I kept getting attacked by Voldemort's owls, since he was kind of petty that Loop and wanted to screw over Harry. By the end, I was half-owl, half healing spells!"

"Hello, darlings!" Pouring some more punch into her glass, Rarity cantered over towards the other girls, daintily balancing the wineglass on her back. "Is it just me, or do we have a lot of unfamiliar ponies this Loop?"

"I know, right?" Pinkie Pie said, popping out from under the table. "I wanted to throw 'Welcome to Equestria' parties for them, but none of them responded to the Ping! Soooo, I guess we've got a Stealth Looper here, since nobody without an Element responded to the Ping!"

"Ah wonder if it's Picard again?" Applejack asked. "Then again, Ah think that the Anchor might be Janeway or something. Or maybe someone from a new Loop. Thought I heard sumethin' earlier, like a bad Ping. Like, they didn't know how ta do it right."

"Oh, *fiscus,"* Rainbow Dash sighed. "I don't even know if she's *Looping* or not, and she still makes me nervous."

"You *do* realize that the Crazy Janeway we've heard about before *isn't* her Baseline self?" Rarity asked, raising her eyebrows.

"Yeah, but the one time I ran into her personally, I ended up Looping in as Tom Paris. Annnd I Woke Up right when we were testing that new shuttle." Rainbow cringed at this memory. "Not fun. Not fun at all, especially since she only got crazier and crazier over time."

"There you are!" They turned around to see what looked like an animate Smarty Pants. Except this one had slitted eyes and Nyx's Cutie Mark.

"Another Smarty Pants Variant?" Gilda asked. "Which one this time? One of Sparklebutt's experiments gone wrong? A ghost possessing her doll? Adopted sister?"

"The first one this time," her fellow Element of Honesty replied, looking around a bit. "Hey, did any of you notice anything weird on the moon? I can't really control it like normal this time, but I thought I felt someone else other than Luna on it."

"Maybe that's where our missing Anchor is," Rarity speculated. 'I wonder who it is this-"

"There they are, hee ho!...I think," said a voice from behind them.

Turning around again, they saw Fluttershy, flanked by what looked like a walking snowman and a small, blue-coated pegasus filly.

"Who're you fellas?" Applejack inquired. "Y'all other Loopers?"

"Uh, yes, but-" Fluttershy trailed off as she saw Nyx, and put the pieces of the puzzle together. Her eyes practically popped out of her head, and her entire form went rigid with shock. "Oh...oh *buck!*"

"What's wrong?" the Nightmare incarnate asked. "Do I have something on my face? Did my fabric tear again?"

"No, that's not-**"** Fluttershy shouted. Quickly, she clamped her hoof to her mouth, preventing herself from going any further and drawing everypony's eyes on her.

After a few moments of deep breathing and biting down the bile rising in her throat, she allowed herself to continue. "We...we have a problem."

A flash of light in the sky, followed by a loud *boom* interrupted her. Everypony (and the scant few non-ponies) looked upwards, at the lightshow that had suddenly manifested on the moon.

"Oooooh! Aaaaaahhhh!" Staring at it in awe, the fairgoers stopped in their tracks to marvel at this amazing fireworks display.

"A *big* problem," Fluttershy corrected herself.

[Nocturne], [Devil May Cry], [other referenced branches]
The kiss of death
Author: wildrook

Dante couldn't believe what he was hearing. Truth be told, he experienced a few loops like the one Naoki went through, but he HAD to hear the full story.

"And they imprinted on you?" was what he asked Naoki.

"Unfortunately," was what Naoki replied. "I haven't even arrived to the part where the Black Sekirei got involved in these shenanigans..."

"You're telling me that there's a world looping that has aliens that are 105 women, 3 men, and a government conspiracy involving some kind of 'game,' while the kid in the South treats his like collectibles while the one on the east is trying to buy out the head company," Dante started. "On top of all that, a GUY reacted to you before shifting preferences, then this bloodthirsty chick tried to...not sure if you said kiss or kill...then again..."

"Dante, focus," was what Naoki muttered. "I really don't want to hear about your moments with Trish and Lady again."

"Right. You were talking about how the Gamemaster happens to be off his rocker, THEN dropped the bomb where he revealed that he's your father..."

"Except he wasn't. The guy I replaced, Minato Sahashi, was. I'm assuming he's the Anchor of that particular loop, and considering the stuff I've seen, I'm under the impression that he's a spineless wimp."

Dante then rolled his eyes. "I'll be honest," he said, "you're the second guy I've known that went through a fused loop or two like that."

Naoki was surprised. "Who was the first?"

"If you run into a guy named Shirou Emiya, ask him about his In-Flight moment. Still, how'd you de-rail it?"

"I'll be honest, after the stuff I've seen, the Landlady's Hannya mask doesn't phase me. At all. Other than that, this Natsuo guy was trying to get me for getting Karasuba since he was assigned her. Before that, there was Akitsu...and let's just say that I'm glad Louis doesn't act like Minaka...it's like the guy's got HIS insanity."

And by him, Naoki was referring to YHWH. Imagining someone with that guy's insanity and Lucifer's cunning is a nightmare to behold.

"Other than that...where can I find this Shirou guy, Dante?"

Dante was surprised. "Well, if you're lucky," he said, "you'd be a Servant. I went in as Saber, obviously, but I felt like an Archer. Speaking of, I owe the other red-coated guy a rematch. Otherwise, he's got red hair and golden eyes...and has the odd smell of a curse."

Naoki cringed. "What kind of curse?" he asked him.

"Answer me this...how much do you know about Angra Mainyu?"

[Persona 4]
Nanako Awakens
Author: Kalimaru

Narukami Yu Awoke in his bed in Dojima's house. A quick memory check confirmed that this Loop, he'd been fully taken in by Dojima after some disaster had happened to his parents while they were abroad. Moving his hand up and rubbing his face to really wake himself up, Yu felt that something was off. Standing up yielded the same results. Walking over to his dresser, Yu finally noticed that the furniture in his room was an awful lot taller than it was supposed to be. The reflection off his television actually told him the opposite; he was a lot shorter than he was supposed to be. Younger, too. In fact, Narukami Yu found himself to be six years old, exactly the same age as his cousin Nanako. Yu took a few deep breaths, and Pinged.

…

Just down the hall, Nanako rubbed the sleep from her eyes just as a buzzing at the very edge of her perception set all of her instincts on fire.

…

Not feeling any response Pings, Narukami set about getting out of his pajamas and getting dressed. Just as he was pulling on his underpants, his door slammed open. Nanako, outfitted in an ornate white barrier jacket, brought a sword up and pointed it at him. In a knee-jerk response, Narukami summoned Izanagi to block whatever attack this version of his favorite cousin was preparing. What was summoned was, in fact, not the typical one.

Instead, the Izanagi that stood between Narukami and Nanako was only four feet tall, with the same proportions as a child. In its hands was a metal baseball bat, held like a sword before it. Its mask was held on by its headband, a winding white gauze that flowed back from the head in twin tails.

Seeing the sight, Nanako spoke in a foreign tongue. After a few different attempts marked by lilting tones and differing facial expressions, she tried a heavily accented Japanese. "Stand down your familiar, please."

Narukami complied, noting the similarity between his cousin and Nanoha, and made a leap of Loop Logic. Getting Izanagi to ease back and lower the bat, he stepped around his Persona. "Nanako? Are you Awake?"

Nanako picked up on the phrase and lowered her weapon as well. "Yes, just a little Loopy. Where are we?"

Narukami dispelled Izanagi and became acutely aware at his state of undress. "Give me a few minutes to get dressed and I'll meet you downstairs so we can sort this out."

…

Once he'd gotten downstairs, Narukami had begun his explanation as he started making breakfast. "Alright. Before I get too into everything, give me a run through of your identity from out of Loop."

Nanako nodded. "Nanako Takamachi, TSAB Ace Fighter and Operator, wielder of Heaven's Claymore." At the last, Nanako glanced at her sword unconsciously.

Narukami nodded, and served Nanako an omelette as he sat down with one of his own. Nanako was in full regalia, her sword placed between them on the table. The weapon looked like something he himself would use to fight Shadows, and Yu felt a pang of pride that his cousin was also a sword user. Turning to her, Narukami looked her over. Her face was the same as usual, but it was set from years of combat. Her barrier jacket, white with pink trim, was a deceptively thin dress that ended at her knees. Around her shoulders was a shawl, held in place by a pair of wing shaped clasps. The wings showed up again as a pair of ties to hold Nanako's hair in her classic tails.

All signs of Nanoha.

Narukami turned his attention back to Nanako's eyes. "Well, this is your home Loop. The Persona continuity, a part of the Amalaverse. Here, you are Nanako Dojima, hyper-competent

six year old and my cousin. I'm Narukami Yu, and typically I'm your seventeen year old cousin who's visiting for the year while my parents are abroad. Right now, I'm the same age as you, and your father, Ryotaro Dojima, took me in."

Nanako nodded, and started on her omelette. "Variant loop. Nanoha-neechan and Fate kept saying as such when I was there." As the food touched her tongue, Nanako felt something come over her, and her vision blurred. Rubbing her eyes left wet marks on her hands, and she looked back up at Narukami. In response, he walked around the table and gave her a hug.

"Welcome home."

[Persona 4], [Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha]
Nanako Awakens – Prequel
Author: Kalimaru

Nanoha smiled and curled around the source of warmth. "Fate-chan..." She mumbled other words, but was quickly falling back into the sweet embrace of sleep.

A young voice cut right through the fog of comfort. "Nanoha-neechan?"

And like that, she was awake. Flicking her eyes open, Nanoha found herself staring into a mirror. Or... wait. No. That wasn't right.

The girl opposite her struggled out of her arms and got out of bed. "Wake up, Neechan. We need to go to school."

A quick check of her memories revealed that Nanoha had a twin this Loop. "Nanako." Inwardly, Nanoha cringed. *'You've got to be kidding me. Did Mother and Father really not think that this would be confusing?"*

Nanako stopped getting dressed and turned to her. "Yes, Nanoha?"

'Well, at least I'll have someone to interact with before Yuuno and Fate get here.' Nanoha smiled warmly. "You're right. We should get ready. Pass me my uniform."

…

As Nanoha and Nanako walked to school, happily making small talk, they heard a voice call them. "Hey! Nano! Nana!" Together, the girls turned and saw their friends Alisa and Suzuka approaching.

Nanako put her hands on her hips. "Alisa! Why do you keep calling us that? Stop it!"

Alisa simply laughed. "You're just mad cuz you're seven! Nano doesn't worry about it!"

Nanoha chuckled at the childish antics that her friends and sister engaged in. "Don't let her get to you, Nanako-nee. So what did you all dream about last night?"

When Alisa and Suzuka responded with typical bits of 'fluffy animals' and 'food', Nanako went silent. Everyone picked up on it, but Suzuka was the first to speak up. "Nanako? What did you dream about?"

Nanako's eyes seemed to glaze over, and she lost control of her tongue. "Big Bro." Hearing herself, she quickly covered her mouth with both hands.

Nanoha narrowed her eyes in thought. "Like, Kyouya-nii?"

Nanako shook her head. "No. Kyouya-nii is different from Big Bro. Big Bro was friends with a bear, and an idol, and all sorts of people. And he made omelettes." Nanako's eyes glazed over again. "My favorite omelettes."

Nanoha nodded to herself. *'Definitely a Looper. Probably on one of her early Loops, too. I'd better call Fate to tell her.'*

…

In light of Nanako's presence, a number of Loop staples were altered. That night, when Yuuno Scrya was forced to call for help, Nanako was the one to respond.

…

Nanako looked between the shadow creature and the pink pearl in her hand. "What do I do?"

Yuuno the Ermine jumped up onto her shoulder. "Call out the name that appears in your heart! You have the potential!"

Looking within herself, Nanako nodded. "Heaven's Claymore! Please!"

A heavily Scottish accented voice responded jovially. "Aye! Synchronizing Barrier Jacket Formation! Weapon Form Ready!"

Seeing the forming jacket, Nanako felt a small buzz of recognition at the outfit. *'Loveline?'*

Claymore's voice yanked Nanako back to the present. "All systems optimal! Combat Ready!"

Nanako noticed the giant sword now in her hands. It was light, far lighter than it appeared, but she still needed to use two hands to hold it up. The hilt was ornate, a set of balancing scales carved into it with a weight hanging freely off either side. The pink pearl was inlaid at the fulcrum of the scale decal, and from it the Scottish voice spoke again. "Master! Incoming!"

Looking up, Nanako had mere seconds to leap away from the attacking creature. Out of fear, she cried out. "Big Bro!"

Claymore's voice cut in once more. "Barachiel Activated." The weights on the scale lit, and electricity ran up the blade. As the creature jumped at her once more, Nanako lashed out with the sword. In the wake of the blade, arcs of plasma leapt out and knocked the creature back,

injuring it. Before the creature could make another attempt, a beam of light struck it from the darkness and another alighted between Nanako and the now freed Jewel Seed.

"Nanoha-nee?"

Nanoha nodded back at her sister. "Sorry it took me so long, Nanako. I had to meet up with someone. Now, want to learn how to seal?"

…

From there, the changes grew. With prior knowledge, Fate worked with the TSAB to bring in her mother.

…

Entering Precia's chamber, the three mage girls readied themselves. In the center, guarding a giant glass container with her body, Precia readied her own weapons. "So, even my doll has chosen to keep me from my Alicia. So be it. Come!"

Just as Fate and Nanoha readied to leap forward, Nanako held Claymore out to stop them. "Wait, girls, I want to try something." When they made no move to stop her, Nanako stepped forward and held her sword aloft. "Raphael!"

"Raphael Activated." The scale decal glowed with pink light, and the light flowed out from the hilt to the tip of the blade and coated the whole sword in a dull light.

Behind Nanako, Fate cocked her head. "Raphael? Like the Ninja Turtle?"

Nanoha smiled. "No, the angel." As Nanako's sister, Nanoha had been the first to see the new spell in action and smiled wider.

Precia snorted. "So, you would fight me yourself, child?"

Nanako shook her head. "Nope."

Precia snarled. "Lies!"

In that instant, Nanako was behind both Precia and Alicia's container, a straight line of light lay etched through both. With a grunt, Nanako collapsed, Heaven's Claymore no longer glowing.

Raising her hand to the line, Precia laughed. "A useless spell, to result in only-urp!" Doubling over, Precia vomited. Bile and a mixture of compounds fell from her mouth, and the room filled with horrendous smells. Coughing up the last of whatever substance it was, Precia turned and grimaced. "A low blow, child. Inducing vomiting is no way to win a fight."

Nanako laughed weakly from where she lay drained on the floor. "Not vomiting. Salvation."

Precia's response was cut off by a dull thump. All together, the members turned to the glass container. Inside, Alicia Testarossa tapped on the glass and mouthed words to her mother.

Nanoha laughed out loud at Fate's look of surprise. "While we fought and hunted the Jewel Seeds, Nanako had been trying to learn the abilities of Heaven's Claymore. She's only learned the one new one, and it's a total healing shiv."

Nanako groaned loud enough to cut her sister off. "Nanoha-nee, stop expositing and help me! I can't get up!"

…

Lindy Harlaown boggled at the results showing on the med-bay screens. "What did you say?"

Nanako, lying in the bed between Precia and Alicia, huffed. "I fully healed both of them! It's one of Claymore's spells!"

Lindy shook her head. "I have to say that this is getting ridiculous. There is nothing in Heaven's Claymore, spell or otherwise, that could do this. In fact, not once has any sign of such magic been recorded by any civilization that we have records of. I mean, there isn't even a sign of damage! That's just not possible!"

Fate leaned over and whispered in Nanoha's ear. "Nanako channeled magic from her home Loop, didn't she?"

Nanoha laughed. "Yeah. And it seems that her magic is at least closely related to ours for her to use Heaven's Claymore. Or, you know, she has magic from here too."

Fate put on a fake smile. "I shudder to think what the universe is going to do with a mini-you running around making friends by cutting them down with a healing claymore."

Nanoha chuckled. "Aren't you paying attention, Fate-chan? Me and Nanako are *twins*."

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – parts 3 and 4 (also known as Naoki REALLY loses it)
Author: Gamerex27

"I told you," Naoki growled, wringing the blood off of his hoov-*hands,* "not to get in my way. Can't say I didn't tell you so, *Luna*."

"Th...*thank you*," Luna was able to squeeze out. Then, the cured alicorn hissed in pain, clutching at her fractured ribs with a foreleg. "I...I am so, so *sorry*-"

"Shut it," the Demifiend grumbled. "Whining never solves anything. If you *want* to thank me, just leave me alone, and *let me sleep*."

The troubled Anchor flopped down onto the Moon's surface with an audible thud, ignoring Luna's whinnies of pain from having the evil literally beaten out of her. Closing his eyes, he drifted off to sleep. Or, at least, tried to.

He tried to push the ponies out of his mind, but the thoughts kept coming back. The memories of the Loop where he had seen them. At first, he found them hilarious, and he

actually fell over laughing when he saw them for the first time. Who actually *names* their child "Twilight Sparkle?" Why would any species ever evolve pastel coat colors and tattoos on their asses? How could they build castles or even simple tools without hands?

Then, it happened. The Barrier came close enough to Tokyo that some of his friends decided to go to the Bureau to get into the limiting supply of life-saving serum. When he saw Chiaki afterwards, all of his cheer and mockery of the Equestrians left his body in an instant. Her eyes were hollow, and the smile on her face too *perfect* to be real. He scrambled to see them all, classmate over classmate, only to find the same thing. They were empty inside: every part of their beings, every negative, defining trait, every hobby they had, every bit of humanity, ripped out and replaced by a mindless obsession with friendship and harmony. Like the Great Will and his cronies, but given a coat of colorful paint and a transparent attempt at pleasantries to mask their ill will towards the Children of Man.

Even though his access to his Pocket, and therefore his powers, were sealed that Loop, Naoki had refused to just sit by and let these monsters kill Earth itself. He tracked down the various resistance movements, handed them blueprints to chemical weapons and futuristic firearms that he had memorized long ago, and sparked a full scale war.

By the time those six pawns of Celestia had found him, he had already destroyed dozens of their facilities. He fought to his last breath, spitting hate and curses at them even as they held him down and the yellow one poured that elixir of death down his throat.

"*Ah, yes, and then you were dead for the remainder of the Loop,"* said the Demon (he really needed to name it sometime). "*It was a simple matter to overwhelm and crush the pitiful attempt at conditioning the potion held. Again, I ask you: do you wish to see how it ended? How I slaughtered Sparkle and her precious* friends, *and sent Celestia's empire crashing down? Will seeing their suffering put you at ease?"*

"No," he replied, "shut up. Not in the mood. I don't want to even *think* about them. About...me," he said, waving his useless legs about," at all."

"*And yet, you cannot stop thinking about them. Are they attempting to deceive you, and lure us into a false sense of security before they invade and conquer the Earth? Or were they speaking the truth, and the events of our first meeting were just unfortunate happenstance? There is only one way to find out.*"

Using his own Pocket, the Demon materialized a set of DVDs in front of Naoki. Raising his head, he sighed.

"Really? You want me to watch *these*? I know it's their backup and all, but I'll get diabetes from seeing just *one frame* of this crap."

"You and I both know we cannot avoid this forever," the Demon said. "*If we encounter their...lawful...selves once again, we must learn their weaknesses. How to destroy them, how to break their wills, and how to emerge victorious.*"

"*Fine,*" Naoki hissed, pulling a laptop out of his Pocket and sliding the DVDs into the disc drive. "This had *better* be worth it."

"My little pony, my little pony," the narrator sand as the opening credits rolled, "I used to wonder what friendship could be..."

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"I'll tell you what we learned, Discord!" the computer said, playing an episode of Equestria's backup out of order yet again. "We've learned that friendship isn't always easy, but there's no doubt it's worth fighting for!"

Anything further from the episode was cut short by the sound of shattering glass, and a thud from a hoof slamming down on the moon's surface.

Ignoring his now bleeding hoo-*hand*, Naoki pulled back from the broken laptop, breathing heavily.

"A monster that wanted to cloak the world in eternal night and torture her sister's royal subjects," he said to himself. "A pair of ruthless buisnessmen, who were willing to ruin a family's life for a profit. A stage magician who wanted to psycologically break others, just to prove she's better than them. A spirit of absolute chaos, who toyed with the minds and souls of everything he came across for his own amusement. A doppelganger, who planned to bleed a whole country dry of all emotion, leaving behind empty shells. A sadistic tyrant who conquered all he saw, terrorizing his people so much they repressed the mere *thought* of him from their minds. A power-hungry demigod, who sucked the world dry of energy and would have left the entire world to a slow and painful death."

"All of them," he said, his tone steadily rising, "beaten by one thing. Not *magic*. Not *physical force*. No inspiring speeches. No strategy. No *actual effort at all*. All it too for *these ponies* to beat *each and every single one of them*...was the power of *friendship*."

The surface of the moon was silent for a few, seconds, save for Naoki's deep breathing.

"Friendship," he said. "Friendship. *FRIENDSHIP!* No effort, no suffering, no *sacrifice of any kind*, no lasting damage, no *loss*, and not a single negative consequence to show for it! All it took to stop these catastrophies was a *bullshit* Mac Guffin and the POWER. OF. FRIENDSHIP!"

"Not *once* did anyone die!" he ranted. "Not *once* were they ever on their own! Not *once* did they experience any actual pain! *Not once, did they suffer at all!"*

*"*And they have the *nerve*," he said, almost frothing at the mouth, "to call this place a *Sanctuary*?! They have the *balls* to say they can help any Looper, no matter what?! When they themselves haven't had *any real pain, any real suffering* to even *begin to understand* just how *screwed up* the universe can BE?!"

More silence.

"*While your rage may be warranted,*" the Demon said, "*perhaps you should quell your anger for now. They are not responsible for*-"

"I. Don't. Care." Naoki hissed, through clenched teeth. "Their *whole lives, eon after eon,* have been *nothing* but good times, parties, and happiness! Why?! Why do they get every *good thing dumped into their laps,* when every *single thing I try* to *fix my world, to save my friends,* fail EVERY! FUCKING! TIME!?"

Howling in rage, Naoki stood on his hind legs, and beat at a particularly large rock to his side.

If he were in a better state of mind, he might have noticed his control over his self slipping. If he had not been enraged by this unfortunate twist of fate, then he might have remembered exactly *why* having an outburst of rage in the proximity of a goddess only recently purged of all her evil was a terrible idea.

But, as cruel Fate would have it, he did not. When he finally stopped hitting the rock, he saw that he had worn it down to powder. He glanced at his hoo-*hands*, their nail-*palms* blistered and oozing with blood.

"Do you want the power to do it, then?" a voice from behind him asked.

He didn't respond, or even think to ask who this was. Naoki's anger had already blinded him to any reason or form of logical thought.

Had he looked more closely at the vial he had injured himself on earlier, he would have noticed that it contained the infamous Delphinus Parasite from the Schwarzwelt. A virus not even he could resist, supercharging his aggression, lowering what few inhibitions he had left, and pushing every single thought he had towards rampant violence and vengeance.

But he did not.

"Do you want the power to make them pay?" the voice, known to most as Shadowfright (but some as Larry), said, motioning for his compatriots behind him to shush and stop their snickering.

"Yes," he said. "I will *make them pay*."

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Devil May Cry], [Five Nights at Freddy's]
Five Nights at Dante's, with special Amala toppings!
Author: Gamerex27

Dante grinned as he checked the cameras again. While it was weird he had already been in this Loop several times, he couldn't deny that screwing around with these animatronics wasn't kind of fun. Sure, the job didn't pay well, but, as a Looper, he really didn't need to worry about money, since he could always just pawn off some spare weapons from his Pocket if he was strapped for cash.

As he glanced at Chica heading into the kitchen, he noted that the animatronics were acting even weirder than usual. Freddy seemed to be spending most of his time staring at the posters

and newspaper clippings around the restaurant, Bonnie and Chica walked in pairs this time rather than in opposing hallways...

And then there was this Loop's Foxy. This one was even more badly damaged than usual: large strips of the costume had fallen off of him, leaving massive gashes all over his chest, legs, and head with the metal endoskeleton poking through. He didn't seem to be concerned with trying to kill him, either: he mostly just stared into the camera, making bizarre, disturbing, and sometimes just plain *weird* faces at him.

An incredibly loud crashing sound, followed by a mechanical screech, jerked Dante out of his musings. He flicked the camera over to the hallway to see Freddy tackling...*Golden Freddy?*...down the hallway, ramming him against another wall.

Dante felt something grip the back of his seat, and whirl him around. Right before he could pull out one of his guns, he came face to face with Foxy.

For a moment, both of them were silent, leaving both of them at a stand-off. The moment the robot lunged at him, of course, Dante was prepared to activate the Devil Trigger and break him apart piece by piece, but you never know: he might be trying something different this time.

Eventually, Foxy crossed his arms, glared at the demon/angel hybrid, and opened his mouth. "*What the hell is wrong with you, Dante?!*" he asked, in a mechanical, scratchy voice. "*No Ping at all? You're* supposed *to send Pings out to other Loopers, asshole!"*

Wait a moment...even with the distortion and audio glitches, that voice sounded familiar.

"*Naoki?"* Dante asked. "The hell are you doing here?" He pulled out two of his preferred guns and pointed them at Naoki's head.

"*What happened to our contract?"* the other Looper snarked, between the sounds of the two Freddy's struggles in the back of the restaurant. "*If you kill me, you won't get paid by the suits. Thought you'd know that by now, after all those Tandem Runs*."

"First," Dante said, slowly, "I could care less about money. Second, why *shouldn't* I be suspicious of you? Last time I heard what you were doing, you'd lost it. You'd gone full-blown Sakura. And, as much as I don't want to believe it, a few other Loopers told me you tried to *ASCEND!*"

There was a tense silence between the two of them for a few moments, unbroken save by Golden Freddy's cries of pain in the background.

"*Look*," the Demifiend finally said, *"the first part...is kind of true. I wouldn't call it Sakura Syndrome, but...I was in a dark place. I got low*-really low-*and I might have gone on a few murdurous rampages. But the* second *thing you mentioned? Ascencion? Not in a million years.* Okay, *maybe I* was *considering it, to get out of my shithole of a Loop. But...I didn't. I found the son of a bitch that was ruining my life, and killed him.*"

"There *was* someone screwing with your Loop, then..." Dante muttered. "I thought we couldn't actually fix anything in Yggdrasil, though: that's the Admins' job."

"*The old adage,"* Naoki confirmed. " 'Any act of creation or destruction not done by an Admin is a lie.' *Well, it's not true. Sure, Masakado might tell you he was the one who actually ended up firewalling the damn thing off, but I was the one to find the fucking thing in the first place and fight it. Course, it messed up my code a bit: old Stoneface says I'm a 'Travelling Looper' now,"* he said, making finger-quotes with his intact hand. "*Trillions of years, stuck in one of the worst places in the omniverse, and I* finally *get what I* deserve*. A break.*"

"Good for you," Dante said, slowly putting his gun back into his coat. "But if you try to go Sakura on us again," he warned, "I'm going to hunt you down and end you. A few of those Loopers you killed put up bounties for you next time I saw 'em."

"*Trust me,"* he said, "*it won't. I...fixed that problem. With extreme prejudice.*"

Metallic footsteps sounded from outside, and Freddy popped his face in the door, carrying Golden Freddy's severed head in his hands. "*Got him,*" he said, in a mechanized version of Langdon Alder's voice. "*I'm having Arthur analyze the rest of the body now, to see if we can find the best way to exorcize these costumes for the local Anchor to use in the future.*"

"Crewman Alder," a voice said over the restaurant's PA system, "I do not believe this will be particularly useful to this particular Branch. From your personal copy of the back-up game in your DEMONICA, it appears this is a Variant that is vastly different from the Baseline. In addition, we have not taken into account the Expansion recently released in the Hub. I believe that this Branch experiences an abnormally large volume of Variant Loops: therefore, the source, cause, and type of malevolent spirits that possess these animatronics, or if they are even possessed at all, varies from Loop to Loop."

"*Damn,"* swore the Marine. "*I take it the psycho who murdered all those kids is equally malleable too, then?"*

"I believe so," replied the Looping AI.

The veteran of the Schwarzwelt sighed. "*Figures,"* he rasped. "*You're replacing the guard again, merc?"*

Dante nodded. "I seem to come here a lot. You that guy with the 'Iron Man' armor I met a few dozen Loops back?"

"*Yeah"* he replied. "*Still not sure how you were able to deflect bullets with nothing but that coat of yours."*

"Half-demon," Dante said, shrugging. "So...now what do we do?"

"*If you will excuse us,"* Isabeau said, poking her feathered head into the room, "*Flynn and I shall spend this Loop working on our plans to allow our fellows to Loop. Now that Masakado was able to isolate exactly* what *was wrong with out Loop, we may be able to come up with an idea to circumvent the...what did he call it?"*

"I think he called it 'Grimdarkness,' in that memo he sent all of us a few Loops back," Langdon said. *"Whatever this thing was-or is-it's making it nigh-impossible to get anyone else Looping."*

"You do that," Dante said, getting up from his seat. "I'm going to see if I can't find that creepy-ass puppet and put a few holes in it."

With that, the demon slayer left the room, leaving the two Amala Loopers alone.

"*Naoki,"* Langdon said, "*what exactly did you* do?"

"*Haven't we been over this before? I saw those...*ponies*...last Loop, and-"*

"Not what I meant," the Marine sighed. "*I mean, what was that Dante said about you trying to Ascend?"*

"I keep telling people, I didn't *go through with it!"* Naoki hissed through clenched, nestled teeth. "*Okay, fine. I'll just set the record straight now. Here's what happened..."*

[Nocturne], [Devil May Cry]
Hi-No-Squirrelguchi
Author: Gamerex27

As Naoki, Dante, Pixie, and Hee-Ho entered Kagatsuchi's chamber, they prepared themselves for a tough fight. No matter the Loop, he was always a very difficult foe, due to being the avatar of the Great Will (and since he was spread all across the Amalaverse, he had more than enough power to give even the oldest of loopers some trouble.)

"This had *better* be quick," the Demi-Fiend growled. "All of these damn squirrels are getting on my nerves. I mean, Squirrel Forneus would have been bizarre enough on its own. But...Squirrel Hikawa as his demon form? Squirrel Masakado? *Squirrel ME?!"* he shouted, angrily pulling at his bushy tail to make a point. "For the love of*...every single friggin' human was a damned furry in this Loop!"*

"You forgot Squirrel Isamu, hiding his tail under his hat-somehow," Pixie mentioned. "And Squirrel Chiaki, beating all those Manikins to death with an acorn."

" 'S not *all* bad," Dante said. "I mean, seeing my old man as a squirrel demon? That made this whole thing worth it."

"No, it doesn't," Naoki growled. "Kagatsuchi!" he yelled, breaking off their conversation. "We got a Reason for you! Put this Lo-*world* back, exactly the way it was before, or I'll choke you to death on your own Tower!"

"I think you mean 'strangle', ho," Hee-Ho muttered as Kagatsuchi turned his giant round head to face them. "Remember what that masked guy said? Choking is...when...pee-heeple...."

He trailed off as the four of them saw exactly *what* Kagatsuchi looked like in this strange Loop.

"**Even if I would permit you to fulfill your blasphemous wish,"** The avatar of the Great Will proclaimed, twitching its small black nose in irritation, **"Thou hast forgotten thine acorn. The tree of a new world cannot be planted. Furthermore, thou hast slain all other Reason-bearers, leaving this world trapped in-"**

"FUCK IT! I'M DONE!"

With this, Naoki turned his back on the Vortex World's sun and strolled back towards the tower's exit, furry hands folded into his pockets, and a scowl on his face.

"Really?" Dante called back at Naoki. "You're leaving just because the disco ball looks like *every* other demon we've seen in this Loop?"

"I *refuse* to fight that...*thing*," he hissed through clenched teeth. "I might not have any sanity, but I sure as hell have my *dignity*."

"Nope, you're fighting this piece of shit," Dante declared, as he and Hee-Ho grabbed Naoki by the arms and pulled him back to the fight. "I mean, you've killed almost everything in all the omniverse at some time or another, and *this* is what you back out on?!"

Naoki chittered in irritation, then clasped a hand to his mouth when he realized what he had done. "Fine," he said, as Kagatsuchi spun around in preparation for battle. "Let's kill this fucker so we can get the hell off this crazy train already."

[Persona 4]
Squirrelsona
Author: wildrook

Yu Narukami then sweat-dropped.

First off, most of the Shadows were Squirrel-Based, as well as the Personae.

Second, as terrifying as Ameno-Sagiri was, the fact that it was a giant acorn this time didn't exactly help.

Third, why were the Arcana nut-themed this time?

"I need to talk to Igor and Margaret about this," he muttered.

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – parts 5 and 6
Author: Gamerex27

Biting her lower lip, Fluttershy touched down onto the fairgrounds, her enhanced druid senses already working overtime to find her friends.

"Let's see...Rarity always had that faint smell of perfume, and Applejack always smells like...apples," she reminded herself, as she walked past the ponies playing various carnival

games and eating sugared treats. "It looks like they were at that horseshoe-throwing booth, then went towards the-"

"AND STAY OUT!"

With a yelp of surprise, Fluttershy barely managed to get out of the way before two disgruntled guards threw a dark figure out of the fairgrounds with a telekinetic throw.

"If we catch you roughing up the locals again," the pegasus guard warned, "we'll be throwing you in the dungeons next. And it's *warm* down there."

As they trotted off, the figure got to his feet, groaning. "H...hey! You can't treat me like that? Don't you know who -HIC- I am, ho?"

Fluttershy made her way past a few staring onlookers to get a closer look at the stranger. From what she could see, it looked like an animate snowman-about three feet tall, colored pitch-black, bearing fangs and a ridiculous outfit that made him look like a court jester (like what Celestia had hired one Loop where Discord had stolen all the humor from Ponyville to save them).

"I...I'm the demon king, Black Frost, ho! If...If I ever see you again, I'll -HIC- jab icicles through every hole of your body, hee ho!"

"Don't mind him," said a small filly, pushing her way past the crowd. "He's had too much cider, and he gets rowdy when he's drunk."

Rolling her eyes, the tiny pegasus grabbed Black Frost's pants in her mouth and began dragging the drunken demon away. Tilting her head, Fluttershy began to wonder if these were more Loopers: there was some air of chaos magic billowing from their bodies, which almost nopony could use save Pinkie Pie.

As the blue pegasus dragged the snowman behind a tent, Fluttershy sent out a Ping. Sure enough, she got two responses close by-one came back promptly, but one came a few seconds late, and warbled, as if the Looper was too intoxicated to do it properly.

"Um...excuse me," she said as she cantered out of the dispersing crowd and behind the tent, "but are you feeling a little...Loopy?"

"I hee-*hate* when people do that, ho!" Black Frost hissed, swatting at the filly in a futile attempt to break out of her grip. "Can't you just say outright if you're Looping, and skip the little *game*, hee ho?!"

"Ignore him," the other Looper said, as she released the snowman from her grip. "He might sound like a big jerk, but he doesn't have much bite. I'm Pixie, and this doofus is Hee-Ho."

"I'm Fluttershy," the druid said in response. "Your name is a little...*generic*, isn't it?"

Sighing, Pixie held up one of her hooves. "It's a long story, but most demons are offshoots of the greater selves-the ones that you hear about in myth and legends-including me. I

sometimes go by Superpixie," she said, as a staggering amount of magical energy gathered in her hoof, "since I got a big powerup in this Labrynth of Amala..."

"Amala?!" Fluttershy tensed up. "Do you know Naoki?"

"'Course we do," grumbled Hee-Ho, "he's our Anchor! That asshole's been a -HIC- pain in the ass for a while now: always quiet and mood-killing, ho!"

"How long has...never mind," Fluttershy said. "Listen, he snapped at me earlier, then went off to the Moon to be alone for a while. But I felt a...premonition after our fight. Something *horrible* might happen, and he might be in the middle of it."

"Dang," Superpixie replied, shivering a little. "That explains what I picked up with those Feywild senses I got from that Dungeons and Dragons Loop. Like the fabric of reality got punched in the face. We should try to find him. Is there an easy way to get to the Moon?"

"No!" Wincing at the fact that she had raised her voice, Fluttershy continued in her usual whisper. "He seemed really on edge when he Woke up, so if my friends and I try to help him, he might go berserk again. I think our best option is to find the other Loopers and plan something from there-find a way to approach him without setting him off."

"How can you -HIC- be sure Naoki's the one who's gonna screw everything up?" Hee-Ho asked, struggling to his feet. "Sure, he's a douche, but he's not he's not the kinda guy who's crash a Loop on a whim, ho!"

"That's just it." Fluttershy motioned for the demons to follow her, then continued. "What I felt from him is that he's a ticking time bomb...I don't know what happens in your Baseline, but it's almost like he's been damming all of his stress and anger up. Like a powder keg, set to blow at any moment. I can only hope we have enough time to snuff the fuse before he explodes.

•••

"And *that's* why Nyx not being Nightmare Moon is a bad thing," Fluttershy told the other Elements of Harmony, as Black Frost gorged himself on pie at the snack tables, and Pixie tried in vain to wrench him away from what few snacks remained. "It's not *Luna* that I'm afraid of..."

"It's the Nightmare Force," Rarity concluded grimly. "If he is as volatile as you say, there's no telling what could happen if they get their...appendeges...on him. I mean, they practically turned me into an alicorn in Baseline!"

"We need to get to the moon, then," Applejack added. "Dashie, can ya fly Pixie up to the Moon, an' see if she can help him?"

Nodding, Rainbow Dash grabbed Pixie in her hooves, then blurred out of existence as she blasted beyond Rainboom speeds towards the lunar body. Several seconds later, she landed again, rubbing at a large welt on her forehead.

"Ow..." she groaned. "Celestia's seal around it is *way* stronger than it usually is. It's keyed to her magical signature, too: even if I ascended, it might take to long to wear the dang thing down."

"Don't worry!" Pinkie Pie said, slapping Dash on the back. "I'm sure she'll help bring down that barrier if we just talk to her!"

"I *really* hope you're right," Pixie said, pulling a charisma potion from her Pocket. "I can almost *hear* the Feywild shaking in anticipation. Something is going to go down, and if we can't convince Celestia to help bring down the barrier...well, *Oberon knows* what might happen."

•••

"What part are they at now?" Nyx asked as the group of ponies and demons reached the center square, where Celestia was about to give her speech. "I usually don't Wake Up early enough to come here, since I'm usually still with Luna. Part of Luna. Same thing, I guess."

"We've only got have a few minutes," Rainbow Dash said, "so we need to get backstage quick to talk to her."

"Wait a second," Rarity interrupted, "why would Celestia listen to *us?* We haven't been with Twilight this Loop, so she wouldn't know that we're the Elements of Harmony."

"That's what this is for," Pixie said, hoofing over the charisma potion to Fluttershy. "We're going to need some other way to convince her to break the seal and defeat those Nightmares you mentioned, before Naoki runs into them. This is from one of those dungeons we went to a few Loops back."

"And since we all have a part to play in this festival," Fluttershy noted, "she'll probably listen to us anyways. We just need to tell those guards that something's wrong," she said, pointing a hoof at the guards standing by the stage entrance, "and we can talk to Celestia. I think."

Tilting her head back, she downed the potion in one gulp, then shuddered.
"*Urgh.* It *tastes* fine, but that texture is like drinking sand."

The group approached the back of the stage. The guards, who had just been casually chatting about last night's hoofball game, snapped to attention, their wings extending to block the door. "Halt!" one of them said. "If you don't have the Princess's express permission to enter the complex..."

"You mean a backstage pass," muttered his comrade.

"Shush! If you don't, then leave this area!"

Fluttershy blinked rapidly, as the potion took effect, giving her exactly the right words and posture to solve this problem. "I'm the pony in charge of the bird's choir," she explained. "There was a bit of the problem, though: the dirunal birds are feeling a bit under the weather.

I need to ask Princess Celestia if she could delay raising the sun a bit, so their medication can kick in."

Tilting his head, the guard studied Fluttershy. "Hank," he said, "please inform the Princess that somepony needs to see her."

The other guard nodded, and trotted backstage. Mere moments later, he galloped back outside. "I'm terribly sorry, ma'am, but the Princess is just about to go onstage for the big speech. You'll have to wait until the speech is done to speak with her."

"But this is *important,*" Fluttershy stressed. Already, she could feel her mane stand on end. The sense of forboding grew more and more, as the tall trees and birds flying high above grew quiet in awe and terror. "If we don't speak to her now-"

Before she could even finish her sentence, a colossal impact shook the earth beneath their feet. All the ponies in the area were flung into the air a few feet, shrieking in surprise and struggling to land hoof-first.

Moments later, everypony and demon landed on each other in an undignified heap.

"Gt ur hff out o mi fac, He-whoh!" Hee-Ho hissed, muffled by the appendage lodged in his mouth.

"Um...sorry," Nyx said, as she removed her hoof from the demon's mouth and hopped off the ponypile. "I think...Luna's here. I can feel it."

"Maybe...she just broke out early?" Rarity said hopefully.

"Wheeeeeee!" Pinkie Pie squealed, having been sent flying higher due to her lighter weight. However, by the time she had come down and seen the sight on-stage, her face had frozen into a no-longer real smile.

"Um...Girls?" she said, much more slowly than she usually spoke. "It...it's *super bad!* Really, *really* bad! Like, I'm going to have to throw a super mega big Chaos party to-"

Out of seemingly nowhere, Fluttershy doubled over in pain, clutching at her head with her hooves.

The noise of the world around her was drowned out, as the empathic abilities of the Element of Kindness kicked into overdrive. She felt...pain. Agony: the kind one felt when they were dying a slow, painful death. But beyond that...

There was hate. Sheer, undiluted *hate*. Hatred that would make a Dalek quake in terror, and hate that gave an eons-old Looper like herself pause. Hate unlike anything ever seen on the face of Equestria. Hatred that did not belong in this, or any, world.

She barely managed to stay upright as her vision swam, the barrage of emotions nearly knocking her on her flank.

"...cube? You alright?"

Slowly, Rainbow Dash and Applejack faded into view. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see everyone else running full-tilt towards the stage.

"You blacked out for a few seconds," Dash told her. "Listen, if you're still woozy, I can carry you on my-"

"No." Shakily, Fluttershy got to her hooves. "I'm fine," she said, as the other Loopers led her around the stage. "What exactly..." she trailed off, at the sight in front of her.

And what a sight it was. Hundreds of ponies, shocked into stone-cold silence. A horrified Princess Celestia on the stage, frozen in terror.

And Luna. Or, to be more precise, Luna's mangled and broken body, barely clinging to life. She breathed slowly, her breath labored, lungs punctured due to the bits of bone spread all over her insides. Her legs twitched, bent at *wrong* angles. And, while there was almost no blood, it was obvious to anyone looking that the Princess was at death's door.

"Sis...ter...." she managed to say, tears welling up in her eyes. "I'm... sorry. I was wrong. Please...Stop *him*. He will...he musn't...*stop him."*

With that, Princess Luna's eyes closed, and her breath ceased. The Diarch of the Moon, one of the most powerful ponies in all of Equestria, was dead.

"Lu-LUNA!" Tears flowing freely down her muzzle, Princess Celestia fell to the ground, cradling her sister's body. "LUNA!" Her horn blazed with a brilliant white light, as the Princess desparately tried every healing spell she knew. But it was all for naught: while the magic of ponies can do many, many things, it cannot bring back the dead.

The crowd was still shocked into silence. They didn't even scream, as most ponies' brains had not yet fully realized what had happened.

"That..." Rainbow Dash swallowed. "I've seen ponies die before...we all have...*we've* died before.....but..."

"It's never been that *brutal*," Applejack finished. "Whoever did this ain't right in the head."

"The only person who could have hurt her so badly..." Fluttershy said, her eyes widening in horror, "would be..."

"Ha. Hahahaha. Hahahaha! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!"

Before anypony had time to react, a bolt of pure magical energy erupted from the heavens, striking Celestia head on. She vanished, too consumed by grief to even sense the magic coming and move away.

The stage quaked once more, as a hole in reality was ripped in the air above the audience. Out of the rift stepped...a pony?

No. Whatever this *thing* was, it had thrown away any sense of equanity, or humanity, it once had. Its coat was matted, spread all over the place as if it had been caught in a twister. The

skeletal wings on its barrel flapped in the breeze, the stitches tying them to its side holding fast in spite of their massive weight. The pitch black horn on the back of its neck pulsed with eldritch power: the same colorless power that comprised the monster's mane. A twisted mockery of a Cutie Mark adorned its flank, the infinity symbol shattering all across its flank, and spotted with blood.

Its eyes darted from pony to pony all over the crowd, black sclera shrinking as its yellow eyes dilated.

"What's the matter, *my little ponies?*" it finally sneered. "Never seen *a corpse* before?!"

Flapping its wings, it landed by Luna's body, glancing over at it. "Although, I don't blame you if you're not impressed. I mean, I did a *crap* job on this! Look at it!" it exclaimed, waving its forehoof at the battered and broken corpse in front of it. "She's still in one piece! And you can barely see any *blood* at all! She died of *internal injuries*! How *lame* is that?!"

"What have you done with the Princesses?!" demanded Mayor Mare, the first pony to finally snap out of their terrified trance.

"Really?" snorted the monster in front of them all, "it's not obvious? I just teleported that white asshole...somewhere. You know," it shrugged, "I *think* I was aiming at a black hole, but I might have missed. Still not used to these 'Nightmare Powers' yet."

"Is...is that Princess Luna?!" Twilight said in a small voice, backing away from her spot in the front row.

Noticing her, the monster flew right up to Twilight. "Why, yes it is, little girl! And she's-*guess what?! Dead!"*

Coming too close for comfort, he grabbed Twilight's horn in his hoof, as she Unawake Anchor struggled to get away. "Do you know what that means? You'll *never see her again!* She's *gone*, never to return!"

"And, for that matter, *so are you!*" Before Twilight had the chance to scream, she vanished into thin air. "Good luck using those Elements of Deus Ex Machina now, *fuckers*!"

"Naoki!" Pixie managed to spit out. "*Why* are you doing this?!"

Looking at her, the monster doubled over laughing. Once it managed to pull itself up from the ground, it sneered again. "Naoki Kashima died a *long* time ago, along with the rest of the Earth. Who am I, then?"

"I," it declared, "am the Fiend. And I'm not here to bring Eternal Night, or be your king, or any of that stupid shit. I'm just going to make all of you *suffer*."

Miscellaneous part 4 & Naoki loses it - Parts 7 to 12

[Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne], [Shin Megami Tensei IV]
Christmas DLC!
Author: Gamerex27

"What in the nine layers of hell am I looking at?!"

"Wellll," Pixie said, passing the binoculars to Naoki, "you know how pretty much everything from myth and legends is real in our Loop?"

"Yeah," Naoki replied, "but...shouldn't that be *Santa* Claus there, and not...."

"Bwhohohoho!" chortled the massive spiked demon, hauling the sack across its back. "*Sanat Claus* is on his way to give presents to all the good little demons of the Mantra!
And *you,* pawns of Nilho, are on the *naughty list!*"

"You know," the Demi-Fiend remarked as Father Christmas (?) beat the demons to death with his sleigh, "that thing is sometimes...me. In the future, I mean. Sometimes, the Magatama keeps on growing and growing, and I end up as that *thing*. Probably the Gaia Rage spell-Yggdrasil makes weird connections like that."

"So, he's not giving a present to us? Shouldn't we be on the naughty list?" Dante asked, grabbing the binoculars from Naoki and taking his turn to stare at Sanat. "I mean, we *kill* God's avatar and all..."

"You really don't get it yet?" Naoki asked. "Sanat's the Chaos King, and considering all the stuff we do in baseline..."

"Bwhohohohohohoho!" Stepping over the bodies of the Nilho demons, Sanat hopped over towards the group. "Little demons, it looks like you're on the 'Nice' list this year!"

"...Yeah, I guess that makes sense," Dante said.

"For you, Mr. Hunter, the blade Sanat Kumara!" the demon declared, handing Dante a sword crafted from red-tinted iron. "You find any angels, this'll cut them to ribbons!"

"Nice. Always wanted to try the sword in the teeth thing that pirate did," the son of Sparda said, putting the sword in his Pocket.

"And for you, little fairy, a few new spells!" Sanat handed an ancient spellbook to Pixie. "I hope you enjoy the Severe Thunder: you Pixies always like the fireworks!"

"Coooool!" Pixie squealed, flipping through her new grimoire. "Thanks, Mr. Sanat Claus!"

"And for you..."

"I think I already got what I wanted," Naoki remarked, rubbing at the phantom scar near his heart. "A change of pace. And that'll hold me over for a few quadrillion years, I think."

"Nonsense!" Sanat said, handing a small package to the Demi-Fiend. "You deserve a reward for all you've done for Chaos! Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to find that Chiaki girl! Merry Christmas!"

Hopping back in his sleigh, Sanat Claus laughed, and flew into Kagatsuchi's new phase, his bloodred spines slowly vanishing into the horizon.

"Speaking of that, don't you usually scramble to find your friends by this point?" Dante said, motioning to the Mantra's headquarters. "I mean, that's all you did in half the Loops I've known you."

"Haven't met the *real* them for trillions of years." Glaring at the HQ, Naoki turned his back on it, then grinned at the unfamiliar Pokemon title in his hands. "Whoever they are, they're not my friends anymore."

...

"Flynn," Isabeau said slowly as her friend emerged from the Samurai barracks, "do not look directly at the square."

"And a good Loop to you, too," Flynn said, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "Isn't it Christmas morning, according to Tokyo's calan-*GOOD LORD!"*

"Thou who hast faithfully followed The Lord's commandments," said the massive blue figure in Aquila Plaza, "you have earned a boon from Heaven. For *Satan Claus* rewards the worthy!'

"Gah...I thought Satan was a *man!*" Flynn swiftly covered his eyes, trying to burn the image of Satan out of his brain.

"I doubt that gender applies to demons," Isabeau remarked, "and the angels have always been fliud with their sexuality, from what I have learned across Amala."

"But...the *bosom.* Is that truly necessary?! And shouldn't this be the actual Father Christmas?! Santa Claus!"

"I believe that it is one of those 'Single Letter Displacement Errors' the magus Potter mentioned when we met," the Anchor said, as she watched Satan give out presents to the Luxurors (but only out of the corner of her eye). "I do agree, however, that this is *not* a pleasant thing to see."

"May I suggest that we quit this sight?" Flynn said, pointedly looking away from the crowd and the angel towering over them.

"I suppose...but I would wonder," Isabeau thought aloud. "Were we still faithful Samurai, what would *our* gifts be?"

"Now, I believe I would ask for our comrades to begin Looping," Flynn remarked, as the pair headed back into the Barracks. "As my own Awakening was due to a 'freak accident' as *they* put it..."

"Fear not," Isabeau reassured him, a small smile sneaking onto her face. "Now that we are aware of exactly *what* our problem is, we stand a better chance of overcoming this hurdle. No matter how long it takes..."

"We'll find a way," Flynn agreed. "Now, I believe you agreed to teach me how this new camera works last Loop..."

[Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – parts 7 and 8
Author: Gamerex27

"Oh buck, buck, buck, buck!" Fluttershy screamed internally. *"I should have...what have I..."*

"And you know what?" The Fiend said, casually leaning against the edge of the stage. "Why waste time gloating, or telling you my eeeeevil plans? Actions speak louder than words, after all. And *I* never got any warning."

It raised its forehoof, sweeping it across the terrified crowd of fairgoers. "I think I'll start with...*you!*" it exclaimed, pointing directly at a terrified Diamond Tiara.

Shakily, the Unawake bully backed away as the Fiend glided over to her, primal fear overriding her usual haughty attitude.

"G-get away from my daughter!" From seemingly nowhere, Filthy Rich sprang into the air, tackling The Fiend in an attempt to save his beloved filly. Even though the two were roughly the same size, he only managed to push the *thing* several meters to the left.

"Hm?" The Fiend stretched out its wing, twisting it in unnatural directions to seize the buisnesspony in its skeletal grip. "Ah. I get it. The dotting daddy, desperate to save his little girl from the big ol' monster, huh? On second thought, this works better. *Shibaboo!*"

The stallion went rigid in the monster's grip. Gently, it plucked the pony from its wing with its forehoof, somehow managing to carry Filthy Rich's entire weight on one limb.

"You all came here to see a show, didn't you?" The Fiend said, in the same tone one would use to tell a stranger the time of day. "My first trick! Tearing this man in half!" He grabbed Rich's neck in one hoof, and his tail in the other. "Are you watching, *daddy's little bitch?!"* It sneered, as it began to pull. "I'm gonna make daddy *dissapear-forev-"*

Mercifully, the demon was cut off by a colossal bolt of lightning slamming into its barrel, sending it flying across the fair grounds. Its concentration finally broken, the aura of terror it had radiated dissapated, leaving the ponies to finally grasp what had happened.

As prey species are wont to do when faced with danger, the entire crowd proceeded to scream at the top of their lungs, fleeing in unison from the fairgrounds in a massive stampede.

"As much as I *really* don't want to do this," Pixie said, stepping over the still paralyzed body of Filthy Rich, "I'm not going to let you hurt all these dem-peop-*ponies,* Naoki."

She was met by chuckling from the distance, as the Fiend flew back towards the stage. "Should've known it'd be *you,*" it snarled. "Always killing my fun! 'Naoki, help me rescue my people! Naoki, you can;t fight all four Archangels at once! Naoki, you can't obsess over saving those humans every Loop! You have to **move on**!' Bah!"

"Looper or not," Applejack declared, stepping forwards to stand with her fellow Looper, "we ain't gonna just *let* you kill everypony here."

"If you expected us to be froliking, brainless, and helpless morons like the G3 ponies," Rarity added, her horn shining with power, "you are *sorely* mistaken."

"Heh. I'm still getting what I want, you realize?" the Fiend said, as it leisurely took another worm-shaped creature out of its Pocket. "I wanted a fight-some good old fashioned violence. Whether the poor assholes I'm beating can actually *throw a punch* doesn't really matter."

"We need to find a way to stop this-*without* ponies getting hurt," Fluttershy whispered to the other Elements of Harmony. "He's an Anchor, and he's...*snapped*. Killing him would mean he'd just rampage in other Loops!"

"No party cannon, then," Pinkie Pie said glumly. "But hey, I did feel an Element of Magic Awake earlier! Maybe we could use the Elements to-"

She was struck by a fireball mid-sentence, sending her sprawling across the ground. "Owie! Okay, no more Ms. Nice Pony!"

The Fiend laughed. "This is *hilarious!*" it declared. "You-peaceful, harmony-worshiping *p---ies* think you can actually *fight* me?" It swallowed the Magatama, then continued." What happened to that *precious* 'Friendship above all else' crap?!"

"Just because we don't *want* to fight," Nyx declared, "doesn't mean we *can't*! I'm gonna make you *pay* for hurting Mommy!"

"Dashie," Fluttershy said, "do you remember where you felt the Magic Ping from?"

"I think so," the Element of Loyalty replied. "Be back in a few minutes."

With that, she took off, blazing away at speeds that far surpassed Rainboom levels. Fluttershy sighed. "Naoki, we want to *help you!* We don't have to-"

"Don't have to *fight?"* The Fiend finished. "Guess what: *too bad!* I *want to* fight! Bring it on, *bitches*!"

…

"Now," the Fiend said, "who do I kill first? The fun-loving, vacant, mindless pink one? The shallow, wimpy white one? Or the blue-"

Whatever he was about to say was cut off by slash to the face from the Celestial Brush. Grunting in pain, it fell out of the air and landed right on its haunches.

"You're a *bloody* idiot," Gilda snarled, readying another swipe of holy energy. "You think you can threaten to *rip a stallion in half* and get off scot-free?"

"Course I can!" the Fiend gloated, firing back at her with a gargantuan fireball. "I mean, it's not like it'll *matter*: he'd just be back next Loop. Don't you get it? NONE of this matters! NOTHING matters! NO ONE matters at all!"

"Non-Loopers are still people too!" Nyx shouted. Covering herself in a cloud of darkness, she emerged in a shrunken version of her Nightmare form, gathering the remaining dark magic around her horn. "I don't *care* if me-the Nightmare Force is making you do this! You have no right!"

"Nightmare what?" the Fiend asked, sounding puzzled as it lunged at the filly, ignoring the pulse of dark magic she had used on it. "Oh, those bugs on the Moon. You really think *they're* pulling my strings?!"

"If there's any part of you-" Nyx paused to dodge the massive by comparison pony flying at her, "that can hear me in there-"

"I just told you, dumbass! There're ain't no strings on me!" The Fiend laughed as it whirled back around, grabbing Nyx's wing in its hoof. "Everything I'm doing is 'cause I want toACKGH!"

It flipped head-over-hooves in the air, catching itself on its wings right before it hit the ground, or the pillar of stone that had launched it in the first place..

"You wanna fight?" Applejack asked, cold steel in her voice. "Then *shut up* and stop *talkin'*, ya varmit!" she declared, sending more and more spikes of earth at the abomination. "You ain't gonna listen to a darn thing we say, so what's the point in big speeches?"

"That's the first thing *any of you* said that's made any sense!" Howling with laughter, it dodged every one of Applejack's strikes, then slammed its forehooves down on a pillar. Activating the spell, the fairgrounds shook, as the dirt and soil turned a lifeless red. "Try that again, *bitch!*"

Rolling her eyes, Applejack leapt up onto the stage, and tapped her forehoof against one of the metal support pillars. Ripping the still-forming Gatling Gun out of place, she pointed it at the Fiend and cranked the handle. "Metalbending's a thing, y'know!"

"So, you said I was shallow, did you?" Rarity bellowed, channeling the Royal Canterlot voice as she ascended to Alicornhood. "I've got all the depth I need right here in my Pocket!" She yanked out a dress made of solid light, slipping it on in a split-second. "Elegance does not

mean *weakness!*" With that. she channeled the magic of the dress, sending twin beams of light out of her eyes.

"Two can play at that!" The Fiend countered with its own Freikugel spell, its eye lasers clashing with Rarity's own. "You're not gonna beat me at my own game!"

"She won't have to, silly!" The Fiend broke off the attack in surprise, only to be hit by the twin blows of Rarity's spell and Pinkie Pie's cream pie. "I never wanted to use that acid pie," she muttered, ducking behind a rock and reappearing from the branches of a nearby tree for another blow, "but waste not, want not!"

Hissing in pain, the Fiend clutched at its face, trying in vain to scrub the acid out of its eyes. "So you-*geeeehhh*-got a few tricks up your sleeves," it growled, leaping into the air to avoid the combined magical blasts/secondary volley of bullets/swipe of divine magic from its assailants. "You think you can beat a man who took out one of *the Great Will's* avatars itself?!"

"**We don't think we can,"** bellowed a voice from behind it, as a massive shadow fell over the monster. "**We *know* we can."**

Before it could twist around to deliver a blow to the new foe, it hissed in pain as a colossal, clawed hand clenched around its entire body.

"**I'll make this *quick*: it's better than you *deserve!***" Fluttershy's Tarrasque form boomed, clenching its fist tighter and tighter. With a sickening crunch of bone, she fractured nearly every bone in the Fiend's body.

"Not...bad..." it wheezed, as Fluttershy loosened her grip enough to let it fall to the ground. "But, you don't have the *balls* to finish-"

It was cut off by the giant beast slamming its foot down on it with its full weight.

"I don't *want* to, but I *can*, I will...and I *did.*"

Even with countless years of experience, shapeshifting into a form as complex, gigantic, and mighty as the great and terrible Tarrasque demanded more magical energy per minute than Fluttershy was willing to burn at the moment. In a matter of seconds, she had shrunk back to her normal, albeit alicornified, size.

"Something tells me..." Gilda said, staring at the twitching abomination's body, "that he's *still* not dead yet. We should finish him off *now!"*

Drawing a circle right above the impact crater Fluttershy's foot had left, she unleashed the full might of the sun. Or, rather, she *would* have, if Nyx didn't force the makeshift star to vanish with her innate magic. "Hey!"

"Fluttershy said," the other Nightmare remarked, "killing him won't fix this."

"I'm afraid she's right, dear," Rarity said. "Maybe you could draw some Fuinjutsu instead, and trap him in a seal...at least, until Dashie comes back with whoever the Magic is."

"I'd argue with you about using the Elements on this guy," Gilda muttered, "since the Bureau's brainwashing started this whole mess, but we kind of *have to*."

"S....s...."

"Oh, you have got to be *buckin' kidding me,*" Applejack groaned, as the Fiend shakily stood on broken, ruined legs, supported only by adrenaline and raw magic.

"So, you can defend this world, huh." Suddenly grinning with malicious glee, it pulsed with an absurd amount of power. "Then I'll just *make my own*."

Stomping its hooves on the ground, huge fleshy vines began to sprout from the ground, covering the Fiend in a cocoon of demonic magic. "Let's see if you holier-than-thou asswipes can beat me with the home-field advantage. In *my Domain.*"

[Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey], [Shin Megami Tensei IV], [The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy]
Damnit, Billy!
Author: Gamerex27

As Langdon Alder entered the Red Sprite, he heard the sadly familiar klaxon of an alarm sound. Quickly stuffing the nuke into his Pocket, he ran into his ship, pushing aside fleeing crewmen to find a terrified Dent struggling to pull open a sealed door with several other crewmen.

"What happened?" Langdon demanded. "Did some idiot let out their demon in the middle of the ship?"

"Worse!" Grunting from the exterion, Dent struggled to lift the metal screen covering the door to the...wait, the *mess hall*?

"Crewman Alder," Arthur chimed in from the comms system, "the anomaly known as 'Billy' has stolen the Cosmic Eggs from the cargo hold. However, some sort of liquid is currently covering the cameras in that room, so I cannot tell you what he is doing."

"Th' varmit who walked outta the dang Schwarzwelt an' started ruining everyone's day?" Irving asked, the metal exosteketon he had built to modify the DEMONICA helping to slowly edge the screen up. "Didn't Gore say he wasn't helpin those Wise Men or Mem Aleph?"

"You are correct," the AI replied. "However, given how Commander Gore advised us to keep watch on him before he gave Crewmen Alder his Brilliance, I fear what may happen if he is permitted near the Cosmic Eggs."

"Stand back." Motioning for the southern scientist and engineer to step back, Langdon keyed in some commands on his Gauntlet. "Shiva, Doppelganger, Samedi! Help me lift that door!"

Crackling with energy, the DEMONICA's Gauntlet sent out a pulse of power, sending the three demons out of Langdon's Pocket. AT once, they proceeded to grab the door's handle, lifting the screen door with ease.

At first, the men and demons stared at the kitchen, not fully understanding what they were seeing. It looked like a mess: flour spilled all over the floor, globs of cookie dough covering the cameras, and cartons of long-spoiled milk lying haphazardly on the oven.

And, in the center of it all, Billy was casually using an egg beater to mix the cookie mix with milk, vegetable oil, and stranger yet ingredients, like pickles, chicken, and...*demon meat?!*

"Billy!" Dent yelled as the boy reached for one of the Cosmic Eggs lying on the table, "don't touch that! You'll break it!"

"Well, *duuuuuuh*!" the boy said. "You gotta break a few eggs to make a cookie? Or...was that a brownie?" he asked himself as he somehow lifted the egg taller than he was in one hand, and held it over the comically tiny bowl.

"Stop!" In one fluid motion, Langdon grabbed his Noisy Cricket out of his holster and aimed it at Billy's head. "Drop the egg *now,* or I swear to Go-swear to *someone* I will shoot you!"

"Oh you don't have to help me cook it, Mister Alder!" Billy said, holding the egg ever closer to the bowl's rim. "The oven's hot enough to do it on its own!"

Time seemed to move in slow motion. Langdon pulled the trigger on the boy, as did his two comrades, shooting what was obviously a demon in disguise, and not a human child. Before the bullets and bursts of energy got anywhere near him, however, Billy bashed the egg against the rim of the bowl and cracked it open.

The last things Langdon saw before the Loop came to a sudden end were the other eggs glowing in eldritch resonance, and Billy licking his lips. Then, everything went black, and he Awoke in what he shortly recognized s Aquila plaza.

"Wha...What just happened?" Shaking his head to clear his mind, Langdon struggled to reorient himself. While he had been to Isabeau's Branch many times, he had never been directly behind her in line.

Upon hearing his Ping, she whirled around in place, fear evident in her eyes. "Langdon! Listen to me: we have to *run!*"

"Angels going crazy again?" the soldier asked, putting his soul-bonded DEMONICA instantly from his Pocket.

"Worse." Isabeau removed her favorite sword from her Pocket, then cautiously stepped out of the line for the Gauntlet Ritual. "Have you seen a small boy with a nose bigger than Igor's?"

"Yeah...he actually just crashed my last Loop."

"*Look around you!"* his fellow Anchor cried.

Langdon glanced at where Hope would be to oversee the ritual...only to see Billy.

He looked behind him in line...only to see a row of Billys behind him, whooping, making disgusting noises, and other horrid things.

He twisted around to see the Samurai guards and Luxurors watching the ritual. All of them-each and every single one of them-were Billy.

And that is when Langdon and Isabeau ran screaming from the plaza, knowing that this would be a truly *awful* Loop indeed.

…

[Bar Loop]
Damnit, Billy! – part 2
Author: wildrook

Dante and Naoki looked at Langdon as they were in the Looper Bar.

"And the worst part was," Langdon said, "he wasn't AWAKE. He wasn't AWAKE!!!"

Naoki looked at him. "I wasn't that bad, was I?" he asked Dante.

"No, you weren't," Dante replied. "Not even during THAT time. Hell, he did more damage in the Pony loop than you did."

Naoki cringed. "The sad part is I'm still not as relieved, and I still have to apologize to Flu-*Yellow*," he said. "I mean, I lost control that time. I've gotten better, so I can control that. But...what happened here was Criminal Stupidity. Kind of makes me wonder if there's a patch to keep idiots like that from Looping."

"If there is," Squidward said, catching them by surprise, "then I'm going to thank the Admin in charge of my branch to keep Spongebob and Patrick from becoming Awake. I can handle two idiots just fine, but three at ONCE? I'd crash the Loop and endure Eiken, thank you very much."

[Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – parts 9 to 12
Author: Gamerex27

"*Faster, faster…come on, Dashie, this is important!"* Rainbow Dash mentally repeated to herself as she streaked across the countryside towards the Magic Ping. Since Twilight was Unawake (and probably dead at that *plothead's* hooves, or worse), and Applebloom was nowhere to be seen, there was only one candidate left.

Flapping her wings rapidly, Dash came to a sudden stop along the dirt road, where Trixie's wagon was parked for the night. Idly, her militaristic pegasus instincts wondered why she was in such a vunerable spot for an attack by robbers, then remembered that even Unawake Trixie would have been able to handle a threat like that.

“Hey! You Awake in there?!” Rainbow Dash demanded, pounding on the door with both forehooves. “C’mon, Trixie! I need to talk to you!”

Slowly, *ever so slooooooowly*, she heard the clip-clop of four hooves on wood. The door swung open, and a tired-looking, baggy-eyed Trixie met her at the door.

“Can this wait for later?” Trixie asked, yawning after she spoke. “Trixie needs to take a vacation. No booms, no fireworks, no preformances…She just got out of a Gurren Lagann Loop, and is exhausted.”

“No, it can’t!” Yanking Trixie out of the wagon, Rainbow Dash looker her in the eye. “We’ve got a *big* problem. An Anchor’s in this Loop, but he refused our help, and *lost it*. If we can’t stop him, he’ll kill every living thing on Equis!”

“…And we require the Elements of Harmony to stop him,” Trixie concluded. She leusurely pulsed a hissing tea kettle out of her Pocket with one hoof, pouring the caffeinated liquid into a thermos with the other. “Why did you come to Trixie for this? Can’t Twilight do it?”

“Twilight’s dead.”

Freezing up, Trixie dropped both the kettle and thermos, spreading perfectly good tea everywhere across the grass. “What?”

“The Anchor’s been compromised by the Nightmare Force,” Dash explained, urgently pulling Trixie away from the wagon. “He *murdered* Luna, threw Celestia into a black hole, made Twilight vanish to somewhere, and nearly *ripped Filthy Rich in half*.”

“I…” Grabbing the dropped thermos, Trixie quickly drank what little was left of the tea, assumed her Alicorn form in a flash of light, then nodded. “Alright. Trixie is ready to rumble.”

“Fairgrounds,” Dash said, preparing for takeoff, “as fast as you can. Which means *now*.” Faster than the naked eye could see, Dash took off and made her way to the fairgrounds in a matter of seconds, with an Alicornified Trixie close behind.

…

“What’d that moron buck up now?” Dash asked, as she landed next to a pacing Rarity.

“We managed to beat him down,” the Element of Generosity said, “but he opened up some kind of pocket dimension-not his Subspace Pocket.”

“And it’s still *growing*,” Gilda added, making a celestial net out of her brush skills. “It was the size of a tree when he started…”

“And now it’s the size of the stage,” Superpixie said, backing away from the mass of fleshy vines and tendrils. “I know what that is: That’s a demonic Domain.”

“Can ya tell us how to deal with it, then?” Applejack asked, pulling up another steel wall from the stage to block off the Domain’s advance.

“If a demon is powerful enough-like, say, me…” Pixie said, “they can make a pocket dimension. It’s kinda like a spider’s web: humans walk into it, get trapped by the shifting landscape, and the demon who made it devours them for lunch.”

An unholy screech came from the direction of the Domain, as it broke through the sun and steel laid by the Equestrians after a delay of mere seconds.

“And…do they expand to be this big, usually?” Fluttershy asked.

“Not really, ho,” Hee-Ho told her. “Domains can draw stuff from the outside world into them and grow, but usually most demons don’t bother expanding on it. They’re fine with it just being a small trap and diner for visitors. And the visitors are the cuisine, hee-ho.”

“He said he’d have the home field advantage,” Rarity said. “This must be what he meant. And if he can draw ponies into there, then…there’d be no way to stop him from torturing them!”

“Can’t we just blow up that unsightly…weed-like…thing, then?” Trixie said, already grabbing a hydrogen bomb from her Pocket and setting up the detonation sequence. “It’d stop him.”

“Yes, that would work in the short term,” Fluttershy said, pulling Trixie away from the bomb with her forehooves. “But he’d still be berserk in the next Loop, and the Loop after that, and the Loop after that…”

“Then we could just resurrect him after he’s dead, and take precautions from there.” Rainbow Dash suggested, keying in the codes to abort the launch sequence.

“But he’s the Anchor,” Applejack pointed out. “We kill him, and the Loop ends. No chance ta help him, no way ta stop him…We kill him, and we lose.”

“…And if we leave him alone, he’ll do unspeakable things to everypony and everyone we love,” Dash grimly concluded. “We fight him and subdue him, but that runs the risk of making it worse. Kobayashi Maru.”

“Huh?” Hee-Ho asked, looking back from the wall of ice he had conjured to slow the advance of the Domain.

“A no-win scenario,” Dash explained. “It’s from a Star Fleet program that pushes prospective captains to their limits-to see how they would handle a scenario in which they and their crew are completely doomed. With no other way out.”

“But we *gotta* stop him!” Pinkie Pie sent a blast of entropic power at the Domain, eroding some of the progress it had made in consuming the world. “No-fun scenario…”

“No win scenario,” Dash corrected.

“No-fun scenario or not, we have to fight him! If Candy Cane doesn’t want parties, I won’t give him parties! If Mister Clef ruins our Sanctuary, we won’t give him Sanctuary!”

“She’s right,” Gilda said, pulling Amarateratsu’s famous Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi blade out of her Pocket. “The bastard’s lost any right to a Sancutary here by causing all this havoc. If the only way to stop him is to beat him at his own game, then so be it.”

“Slavequestria, Molestia, Bureaus, CelestiAI, Tirek, Mandy, the Imperium of Man, the Gods of Chaos, and even Kyubey,” Dash listed off, cracking her neck from side to side. “We beat every single one of those: why’s one crazy stallion any different?”

“It’s good you’re all confident in this,” Pixie said, pulling out her fey knife from her own Pocket in preparation for battle, “but Naoki’s different. Every single Loop, he’s been fighting and fighting demons. Even if we pull out all the stops, I don’t know if all of us at once could stop him.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Rarity told her, putting on her special mithril dress for the battle ahead. “But we have no choice but to try, darling. *Buck* the Kobyashi Maru: there’s always a Loop-hole to exploit. There’s always another choice in the wardrobe, always a way to patch a tear in the fabric…”

“Always a time for *really dumb metaphors*, hee-ho,” the Black Frost muttered.

“..and always a way to win,” Rarity finished, ignoring the snowman. “Is everyone ready?”

“Ah think so. Ah got enough rocks in my Pocket ta build the Great Wall of China, and enough to bash his buckin’ head in!”

“Yep! I was wondering when I would ever get a chance to try the Muffin Shotgun I made a while back, and this looks like the perfect time!”

“I’ve always wanted to punch his creepy-looking face in, so count me in, ho!”

“He’s my friend, so I have a duty to stop him from tearing himself apart. I’m going with you.”

“No one kills Mommy and gets away with it! I’m gonna give that nightmare some *real* Nightmares to be afraid of!”

“You know, I’ve had it up to *here* with these grimdark morons, always whining about how their life sucks. About time I get to take it out on one of them.”

“I’m with Gilda on this one. Let’s see if we can’t beat my record for a total curbstomp fight! Somewhere around 20 seconds flat, I think…”

“This is our mistake to bear,” Fluttershy said, concluding the sound-off, “so we’ll have to clean it up. If a helping hoof can’t fix it then we’ll just have to *buck the evil out of him*.”

“You *do* realize I can still hear you idiots, right?”

For a moment, everyone was silent. Blushing, Fluttershy glanced at the other Loopers, embarrassed to have done all this within their enemy’s earshot.

“Plans, no plans, I’ll still get my way in the end. Trillions of years of learning, suffering, and sorrow. And it’s about time I got karma for everything I’ve been through,” the Fiend’s voice echoed from the Domain.

Slowly, the air before the Domain began to distort, as a white hole in the fabric of space appeared before the group of Loopers.

“Naoki,” Fluttershy said, all trace of kindness and empathy gone from her voice, “you’ve just signed your own death warrant. We’re coming in there, and we *will kill you*, Sanctuary or not.”

“Heh. Finally pushed those peace-loving morons to the only *real* solution to problems. Violence. Then come in, and see how your love and friendship fares against *reality.*”

Fluttershy rolled her eyes, and transformed into an Owlbear in preparation for what was ahead.

“The *realtiy* is that you’re a dangerous psychopath,” she continued. “Anchor or not, we won’t tolerate someone burning Equestria to the ground just because *someone had a few bad days*.”

She was met by only one thing: laughter.

“Right, we’re not getting through to him. Let’s go and stop him before he turns Equestria into the Eleventh Circle of Hell.” Nodding, the assorted ponies, griffons, and demons followed the druid into the gateway, as it shut behind them.

…

"Aloha, my little ponies!"

Kicking open the stage door on the ruined ampitheater, Discord sauntered into the fairgrounds, wearing a tacky Hawiann shirt and very expensive sunglasses.

"Sorry to keep you all waiting," he drawled, "but traffic was *stone cold!* So, who's ready for some good, old fashioned wait what?"

Discord blinked, looking at the utterly empty fair. "Did everypony start a round of Hide and Go Seek when I wasn't looking?" he asked himself. Pulling out a telescope, he swept it across the landscape, then frowned when he still found nothing. "Geez, I know *she* was a bad queen, but *those two* really ran this place into the ground!"

"They have to be *somewhere,*" he muttered. He walked forwards, holding a mismatched paw to his forehead as he kept looking. "Celly and Luna *should be* right-"

He tripped over something soft and squishy, and promptly fell to the ground with a girlish shriek.

"Ah, not bad!" he complemented no one in particular. "You get one free shot, though: judging by the time, I'd say it's...Luna!"

Beaming, he looked around. And then his gaze happened to fall to the floor.

Discord's smile abruptly froze in place. "Okay, the playing possum?" he told Luna's corpse. "Not really a good joke."

"C'moooooon!" he yelled prodding at Luna's barrel to no effect. "Wake up so we can have some *fun!*" Pulling an air horn our of nowhere, he proceeded to blast it right into Luna's face. Still no response.

"Sheesh, don't tell me I gotta give you CPR! I'm *terrible* at that!" Kneeling down, Discord held his paw in front of Luna's face.

"You're...not breathing?" his smile finally fading. "Wait a second...you're *dead?!*"

"Boooooooooo!" he hissed, pulling a red card out and slapping it on Luna's body. "That's...no fun at all! There's no fun in a game when the other player's not even playing the big game of Life anymore!"

"It's...almost like one of *those* guys did this," he said, brushing some residual chaos magic out of Luna's mane. "Like *him.*"

"And what is your point?"

Discord visibly flinched. "You. Of course, it had to be *you*."

For the first time, Discord's face twisted in annoyance. He turned around to see exactly who he had expected: an old mare and her charge. The mare was black-coated, and a veil obscured all of her features, save the Cutie Mark of a jeweled crown on her flank.

He was, however, speaking to the charge: a colt with a blood-red coat and blond mane, and piercing golden eyes. He looked at Discord, with no sense of intimidation, fear, or even any kind of respect. He seemed, of all things, *bored*. Unperturbed, he tilted his head slightly, his horn wobbling slightly and wings flickering, as if it were some kind of demon's failed attempt to look equine to hide their true nature.

"Right, was this you?" Discord demanded. "It's just like you to do something like this! 'Oooh, let's kill the oppressive tyrant who wanted to bring eternal night and dominate everything in an unchanging world!' And not even have *fun* with that! Honestly, you have no sense of *fun* at all!"

"And *you* remain little better than a newborn," the woman replied, "too pre-occupied with playing games to do anything productive for the cause of Chaos."

"Right, formalities are over. *Why* are you *here?"*

The alicorn colt leaned over towards the mare, whispering softly into her ear.

"Is there something you'd like to tell the class, *Morning Star*?" Discord grumbled.

"My master says that he arrived here to examine an anomaly in the fabric of the physical plane," the mare in black said. "He took a personal interest in some distortions in reality around this area-"

"The same kind of 'personal interest' where you lie back and give a few ponies advice on what to do while a mad queen bans fun?" Discord mumbled under his breath.

"-And wished to see it for himself," she finished, ignoring Discord. "As the personification of Chaos-"

"A job I *still* can't believe you got over me."

"Enough," the colt finally spoke, in a much deeper voice than he should have had. "I doubt that you were preceptive enough to notice," he said, finally speaking directly to Discord, "but time itself is broken. It has been twisted into a never-ending loop, like a serpent trying to eat its own tail."

"And it centers on *there*," he said, pointing a forehoof at the rapidly growing Domain. "I sense the presence of a Fiend."

"One the master has said he had not yet created," the mare added.

"But beyond that," Morning Star continued, "madness. The hate of a being pushed to their breaking point and beyond it. And beyond that *still*, a flaw."

"Flaw?" Discord echoed. "There's cracks all over reality, most of them caused by stuff like *us*. Why would you care about that?"

"While I suspect that this Fiend would be unable to destabilize this universe on a planar level," the demon prince replied, "it may cause deep harm to reality if left alone. And, as I am tied to its timeline-I suspect that even *this* is not my native place in reality-the boy *needs* to be stopped."

"Then just go already!" Discord said, flinging his paws in the air. "This is why I hate you!" he declared. "Too obsessed with your schemes to get out there and do any *real* Chaos?"

"Are you aware of the master's contempt for ponykind?" the mare asked Discord, seemingly out of nowhere. "They are herd animals: marching in lockstep, clinging to their precious harmony like a child to their mother."

"Which makes their *fight* against the Fiend so *fascinating*." Walking forwards, Morning Star jumped onto his hind legs, gesturing with both forelegs at the Domain. "To abandon their slavish adherents to harmony they have held for thousands of years, and to *finally* enter a fight willingly?" He grinned, as the Cutie Mark of a goat's head engulfed in flame began to glow. "I want-no, *need* to see how this ends. Can they defeat a demon I planned on molding into my own general?"

"We will see," the colt said, his wings flapping as he fell back onto all fours. "And I will *not* let you interfere."

"I....*urgh, you **killjoy!**"* Conjuring a lawn chair, Discord flopped down onto it, pulling out a tub of popcorn and munching on it half-heartedly. "Fine. Can you at least put up a scrying mirror or *something?* Let me see the action, O *Lord of Chaos,*" he said mockingly.

"As you wish," Morning Star-whom the ancient griffon folk also named Lucifer-said. "As you wish."

...

It was...trippy.

That was the first word that came to Fluttershy's mind as the blinding light all around them faded, to reveal the inside of the Domain. Trippy.

They were in a hallway, twice as tall as they were, but barely wide enough to fit all of them in a three-by-three formation march. Everything was comprised of the fleshy vines from the outside: the floor, the ceilings, and the walls. The hallway extended several dozen meters into the distance, branching off into several different paths.

"Great," Rainbow Dash groaned. "As if the bucker hasn't been annoying enough, he made a *maze*."

"Well," Pixie said, as she pulled a rolled-up scroll from her Pocket, "all Domains turn out like that, to be fair. Remember, they're like spiderwebs."

"Oh, you're *kidding* me." Face slightly green, Rarity held a forehoof to her mouth as she pushed back onto her hind legs and tapped the wall with her free forelimb. "I *would* say this is the worst decoration I've ever seen, but at least these...*things* aren't squishy," she noted, poking it again to demonstrate the lack of disgusting sounds. "They're more like...metal. Still horrific, but not as bad as-"

"Shhh!" Pinkie Pie popped out from between the folds of the tentacles, scaring Rarity back onto all fours as she yelped in surprise. "You Pinkie Promised never to speak of it again!" she hissed, as Rainbow Dash went pale and nodded in affirmation.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good, ho!"

The mares were cut off from the oncoming argument by the incantation. Turning around, they saw that Hee-Ho had snatched the map from his fellow demon, and had used the magical keyword to activate it.

"Well, this sucks," he complained, turning the map over so that everyone present could see the layout of the maze. While it did indeed show a fairly straightforward representation of the Domain, there was no central chamber while Pixie said Naoki would be waiting. Nor, Fluttershy noted, did it show an exit.

"That's *weird*." Yanking the map back from the Black Frost, Pixie stared at it. "If he didn't want us to find him, he could do that thing where all maps break down in a Domain."

"But he wanted a fight, or something," Gilda added. "So why didn't he just write 'plothead here, need talon to face?'"

"I thought you'd *like* it!" The Fiend boomed, its voice echoing off the walls as the more skittish members of the team jumped in surprise. "I mean, you're stuck in the same place over and over and *over and* ***over and-"***

"WE GET IT!" Gilda and Dash yelled in unison.

"Over," it finished. "Take some time to enjoy the new sights! Take some pictures! Buy some local ramen! Go to the hot springs! Recruit some wandering demons for your personal army! Get disembowled by your little horsie friends roaming the hallways for some nice, juicy ass-tattoo meat!"

Ignoring him, Fluttershy glanced at Pixie's map, then motioned for the others to follow her, her face set in an almost-unheard of scowl.

"Did any of y'all see that dot there?" Applejack asked, as the team rounded the first hallway to their left on Fluttershy's lead. "There's a dot there. I can't tell what language that is, but it's got somebody;s name above 'em."

"But who is it?" Rarity asked. "It's an Arabic letter system, and the first and last names are different sized from what Naoki's name is spelled in Equestrian, so it can't be him."

"That ain't the half of it, sugarcube." Applejack checked the map again, then shook her head. "I plain can't tell what language that it. I speak 'bout as many as Uhura these days, and I ain't got a clue."

"Either way, it's close to where we're going!' Pinkie Pie said, grinning from ear to ear as they turned right. "I know he's all 'rargh, I'm a party pooper and I'm here to keel you all!', but it gives me a chance to test the new model of Candy Cane Pylons!" She reached into her Pocket, pulling out a thinner and taller model than the prototype she had used before. "It runs off sugar, so we're not pumping all that awful junk into the sky, and-"

Suddenly, Pinkie Pie found her hoof far, far lighter than it should have been.

"Huh?" Confused, she brought here forehoof to eye level. Where a tall candy cane-themed machine should have been was a pile of ashes.

"No fair!" she whinnied. "Those are expensive to make! I spent thousands of...some kinda money, don't remember what...to get the parts!"

"You're in my Domain," the Fiend replied, "you fight by my rules."

"Right," Fluttershy said, coming to a sudden halt.

"Nope," Nyx said. "We're supposed to go on straight ahead, then take a left-"

"Not that," she replied, shifting uncomfortably in place. "Do you remember what he said about our 'friends?'"

From beyond the corner of the closest hallway, a purple mane poked into view.

"Oh, hi Mommy!" Nyx waved. "How are you! Feeling Loopy at all?"

Slowly, Twilight stepped out from beyond the corner. And Nyx's good cheer vanished from her face in a split-second at the sight ahead of her.

"No, not particularly," the Sleeping Anchor said, dropping into an aggressive stance, hoofing at the ground. "But I am feeling..."

She opened her mouth, and Fluttershy's heart sank. The mangy coat and incensed look in here eyes were bad enough. But the fact that every single one of her teeth had turned to razor-sharp fangs was, as humans said, the third strike.

"*Hungry,"* Twilight purred, drooling as she spoke. "And you, *sweetie*, look positively *delicious!* Why, I could just *gobble you up!*"

"What. Did you. Do," Fluttershy said, in a low and surprisingly menacing voice.

"And I think I *will!*" the mad version of her friend howled, foaming at the mouth as she spoke. She slowly crept towards them, hunger in her eyes and pure malice on her face.

"What. Did you. DO?!"

…

"Oh, no, what to do?" The Fiend said mockingly as Twilight crept ever closer. "Your precious little friend hungers for your flesh! And you've got no choice but to-"

Rolling her eyes, Fluttershy thrust her paw forwards. "**Paralyze**."

Green gas billowed forth from her arms. Upon reaching Twilight's snout, she twitched, and promptly fell over, frozen in place.

"Fight...her." it finished weakly. "Wow, you're *that* much of a p***y, are you?"

"You...okay, mister, *you're going down!*" Switching back into her Nightmare Moon form, Nyx angrily stomped down the hallway. "Right, where the hay are you?!"

"Trixie seems to remember a rule about always sticking to the left side of a maze," the backup Element of Magic chimed in, as she followed the stuffed pony down the hallway. "If we just stick to there, we should be OUCH!"

Squealing in pain, Trixie tried desperately to shake Twilight, moving far earlier than she should have been, off of her leg to no avail.

"You're not getting out of this," The Fiend plainly stated as Twilight bit even deeper, managing to draw blood this time. "I won't let you."

"Sorry 'bout this!' Turning around and rearing up on her forelegs, Applejack proceeded to buck Twilight in the face, forcing her to release Trixie and stumble backwards.

"Heeheehee, not a bad appetizer!" she said, still drooling. "But I won't be full 'till I'm full, which means eating *all of you!*"

"Don't you have a bunch of cages in your Pocket for animals, Shy?" Dash asked, as she flapped her wings rapidly, creating a freakishly strong gust of wind to blow Twilight back. "You could put her in there until-"

"I can't," Fluttershy said, sniffing at the air. "There's something *wrong* with her. Some kind of...supernatural virus affecting her."

"Is that why she's cukoo for Cocoa Puffs right now?" Pinkie Pie asked, pulling a cream pie out of her Pocket, only for it to dissolve the second she tried to throw it.

"If I put her in my Pocket-my *soul*-then I'll get infected too," Fluttershy answered.

"Maybe I can hold her back..." Applejack said, yanking a massive cube of adamantium out of her Pocket and shaping it into a solid metal wall. "That should stop-"

There was a sickening splat of flesh-against steel, followed by another mad giggle. Then, Twilight flung herself against the wall again, which proceeded the sound of another disgusting, squishy thud.

"Oh, for-" From under a pocket of her dress, Rarity pulled out a spool of thick thread. "Just...*hold her down*," she told it, flinging it over the wall. "Did that work?" she asked the resident geomancer, as the thread unfurled and wrapped itself around their mad friend.

Applejack tapped her hoof against the floor-vines, and nodded. "Yep," she said. "she's hogtied good. Still tryin' ta move, but she's down for-"

But from beyond the wall, Twilight kept laughing, which eventually turned into short gasps for breath. Followed by yet more laughing from the Fiend.

"Uh," Applejack stammered, turning pale, "didja mean to wrap it around her neck?"

"What?!" Rarity demanded, relief vanishing from her face, "I *told it to* go around her legs!" Her horn glowed, and her eyes widened. "It's not working! It's...just getting tighter!"

"Hahahaha...nice...job.....ha...ha.....*ha*" Twilight gasped. Slowly, her breath grew softer, and softer, before falling silent.

For a few moments, everyone was quite. And then, Fluttershy suddenly turned into a dragon.

"Is THIS what you want?!" she boomed. "THIS is what you're doing? Forcing us to kill our friends?!"

"Finally," the monster replied, the vines pulsing with power as it spoke, "they get it."

"*WHY?!*" she screamed. "***WHY?! WHAT THE BUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!***"

"Why, little girl, don't you get it yet?" it simply said. "To prove a point."

Howling in rage, Fluttershy tore at the wall to her side, shredding a vine to pieces. "You *want to fight?! FINE, THEN! I'LL RIP OUT YOUR GUTS AND SHOW THEM TO YOU, YOU SON OF A*-"

"Hey, Shy! SHY! CALM DOWN!"

Fluttershy froze when she felt a forehoof slowly touch her scaly hide. Taking a few moments to calm herself down, she finally turned to face Rainbow Dash.

"I'm sorry.....but...even I've got my limits," she apologized. "I...he made us..."

"We can just bring her back-revive her-after all this is done," Trixie added.

"All we need to do is stop him, and we can patch all of this up," Rarity said, still shaking a little from what she had just (even accedentally) done.

"Uh...girls," Pixie interrupted, "Naoki just showed himself on the map. But...it's beyond your wall...so..."

"Just close your eyes or something, ho!" Hee-Ho said. "It's a *corpse!* You must have seen *tons* of them by now!"

"We're not *pushovers,*" Dash growled. "I mean...yeah, *she's dead*, but we've seen it happen before."

"Don't mean we have ta like it." Applejack muttered, tapping her foreleg against the wall and putting it back in her Pocket.

The band of Loopers marched on, trying to avoid Twilight's sprawled corpse right in their path.

"Up there," Nyx said, sounding much less chipper and more beaten down than usual. "There's a door."

"No knob, though, ho," Hee-Ho said, as he stepped mere inches away from the door. "Stand aside: I'll get this!"

Hee-Ho leaned back, cracking his neck from side to side and winding his fist up for a punch. He leapt forwards, fist craned at the door....

And promptly fell to the floor as the door swung open a second before impact."Yow!"

"Well, don't just *stand* there!" the Fiend said. "Come on in! Wipe your shoes first, though: don't want blood getting all over the floor!"

But by now, every single one of the ponies had gone beyond the point of banter, comedic or otherwise. They walked through the door.

It was much less than they had expected. It was a simple, if large, circular chamber: about as big as Twilight's library was, but totally devoid of anything but the walls and ceiling. The only feature of note was a staircase leading up to a door at the other side of the room.

"And the moment finally arrives!" The Fiend cackled. Rather than sounding from throughout the Domain as before, however, it sounded faint, as if coming from all across the massive room. "I'm surprised you actually went through with *killing* your friend! I thought you'd just sit there, whimpering until *Twilight Sparkle* tore your throats out!"

"No more surprises, and no more games," Fluttershy hissed, smoke billowing from her nostrils. "Come out here. Now."

"Oh, if you insist," it huffed. "But, you know what surprised me most of all?"

And before any of them could react, two things happened.

The first was that all of them felt that familiar pressure on their minds and hearts: the feeling of an oncoming Heartsong. But unlike every other tune they had sung, this one felt...*wrong*. Less of a friendly compulsion, and more of a voice screaming into their ears to sing and dance.

And the second thing was a hoof slamming the door open, and the thing that was once Naoki Kashima walking through the door.

And the moment he emerged into the room, Rarity had to physically stop herself from losing her lunch. "You...you..."

"You *skinned Princess Celestia!"* Rainbow Dash said, too stunned and horrified to really do anything else.

The Fiend laughed, the pelt that had once belonged to Princess Celestia shifting and rippling as the mirth shook through its body. And, as it moved, some other things became apparent throughout the room. Tiny strings, no wider than a strand of hair, extended from the exposed parts of its body, attaching to various lumps and tendrils spread all over the room.

Except, as the growths started screaming as the strands moved throughout their bodies to make totally out of place, beautiful music, they weren't just lumps. Faces emerged form the folds of flesh. Faces that were all too familiar to Rarity.

"The...Nightmare Force?" she whispered. "You...did this to *them?!"*

And before the Fiend could answer, the compulsion to join in the Heartsong became too much for them, as they were all herded into the melody by a will stronger than anything any of them had ever felt before.

The Fiend gave them one final laugh, twitched the wires to make the bones grind in a similar way to a piano and began to sing.

"Yooouu followed me here! That's amazing! You actually followed me here! *To this dungeon of despair!"*

"That's hi-la-rious!" it mocked, coming ever closer to the group as they were frozen in place. "*I challenged, you followed! The show spirals on, but kids better take care!*"

"Cause I don't fo-llow your reasoning, kiddoes! *I honestly don't un-der-staaaaand!"*

"What could ever be gained?" it asked as it circled the group, glaring at it in unison. "*By taking a stand against little ol' me? The pawn of gods, Naoki?"*

"But that's," it sang, shrugging its shoulders, "*how it's got to beeeeee!"*

It danced around the room, moving to the tortured tempo of the instruments made from the Nightmare Forces's living bodies, as it moved faster and faster to the haunting minor-key melody.

"*WHY?!"* Nyx demanded, finally freeing herself from the trance. "Why did you kill Mommy? Why are you trying to kill everypony? *Why are you doing this?!*"

In response, it just laughed, and started the next verse. *"Cause I COULD! Cause it's FUN! Do we really need a Reason? Like dead gods and de-mons! To prove we can KILL!"*

"They were there, begging, laaaaame!" it sung, making a mocking expression of Celestia's smile. "*Those self-righteous* bitches*, those stupid old witches! All it took,"* it bragged, "*was a small bit of wiiiiilllllll....to kiiiiiilllllll."*

"To set off! This show of disdaiiiiin!"

"But why did any of you come here at all?" it asked, as the tempo sped up even more. "You realize this is all pointless: your friends will be here next Loop, and I'll be *gone!* Don't you see! You can't save *anyone!* You can't, because nothing *sticks! Nothing matters!*"

"That's why you *needed* me," he continued. "You needed some *excitement*! Some blood pumping in your veins, to break the ever-crushing stillness! How long until the boredom and pointlessness takes it's toll! How long until you *end up like me?!"*

"*NEVER!*" Fluttershy roared. "We'll *never be like you!*"

Once again, the Fiend seemed to ignore her as it launched into the next verse. "*In the end, does it even matter?*" it asked them, holding a forehoof to its chin in thought. "*Am I the monster you* craved?"

"*When the eons still come, your hearts will grow numb! So tell me...just who have you saved...."*

"So bring on the fire, the roars, and the shouts!" it goaded. *"But know you'll be twisted as your....souls....just....give...ouuuuut....ooooooouuuuut!*"

And suddenly, everything made sense to them. Why Naoki had snapped, why he was doing this, and what exactly they were talking to.

Because, the moment before it sung its final verse, its eyes shifted. In a second, they had gone from alien reds to ordinary black schlera.

Ordinary, except for the piercing, sickly yellow eyes.

"For I! Am a Shadow! *And I! Am the* true self *and Iiiii'm you! and you'rrrrrrre me!"*

"So," Shadow Naoki concluded, "*DIE with me! DIE with me! DIE! WITH! MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!*"

"We're NOT YOU!" Fluttershy roared again as the trance finally wore off on the other Loopers. "We're *nothing like you!*"

'Then bring it on!" the Shadow bellowed. "Come at me!"

Miscellaneous part 5 & Naoki loses it - Parts 13 to 17

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – part 13
Author: Gamerex27

"Do you know what monotony does to mortals?" Morning Star asked Discord, leaning back in his wheelchair.

"Oh, gee. I don't know," the chaos spirit said sarcastically. "It *bores* them?"

"I do not mean that as in simple inactivity," the lord of chaos said, now in the form of an old, ancient stallion. "I meant eternity itself."

"Beings such as you, I, and even *Celestia*" he continued, "were never mortal in the first place. We see time not in minutes or hours, but in millions-no, *billions*-of years. I was there when the universe itself was born, you see," he said, pointing at the sky. "It was my power that set the sky ablaze with those shining stars. Some may call us static, true. But the mindset of an immortal allows us to do great and terrible things."

"And there lies the problem with mortals who dabble in time travel," he said, pointing at the mirror standing in front of them. "From when they first stepped out of the slime of this still-molten planet, they were meant to live, reproduce, and die. Every second is precious to them. Those who live beyond a century or so began to dull-with misfortune, their faculties can become impaired and they become shells of their former selves."

"This, chimera, is likely what happened with the boy," the mare in black explained, as she watched the yellow-scaled dragon pounce on the "Anchor" and try to claw him in half. "Eternity is hard enough for mortals to cope with. But with time itself in a never ending cycle of repetition? Where nothing has meaning? No actions, no changes, nothing at all is fixed?"

"Is it any wonder that he went mad?" she asked, as the Fiend effortlessly swatted the wyrm away. "That his mind snapped in half, like a dried twig drained of the waters of life?"

…

"You hit like a *bitch!*" Shadow Naoki taunted, rebuking Fluttershy's strike with a lash of a flesh tentacle from the walls of the Domain. "C'mon! Kindness or not, at least put up a better *oof-"*

He was cut off by Rainbow Dash tackling him into a wall.

"SHUT UP ALREADY!" she yelled. Pulling back her foreleg, she slammed it into Shadow Naoki's jaw at around Mach 60. But the crunch of bone that should have followed did not come: instead, the Fiend turned right around and headbutted her.

"You might be fast, you know," he said, as he unleashed a bolt of thunder and lightning right into Rainbow Dash's bones, "but that's not everything!"

"Can you keep relying on one thing over and over to say the day?" he asked, as Rainbow Dash pushed through the pain, taking a martial arts stance to redirect the lightning at her opponent. "*Branch out* a bit!"

"Oh, *buck off*!" Gilda said, slashing at the Fiend's face with the Celestial Brush. "You think *you're* the only one who's suffered here?! Come off it, you arrogant, pigheaded *tosser!*"

"Mgh muh, *mch!*" it yelled through a split tongue, lashing out at her with more of the Domain's tentacles.

As his tongue slowly knit back together, Rarity mentally activated a telepathy spell.

Everypony?, she thought. *We only have one shot to use the Elements. If he can just cancel out any peaceful solutions like that, the moment he knows we can use them...*

..then he can stop them, Trixie concluded. *Trixie just hopes he doesn't know about me being another Element of Magic.*

What's the plaaAURGH!

Rainbow Dash's question was cut off by another bolt of eldritch lightning to the face, as her coat blackened with soot and ash and her wings blackened and burned. "MOTHERBUCKER!" she shrieked, popping onto her hind legs and uppercutting Shadow Naoki in the chin. "DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH IT *HURTS* TO HEAL THOSE?!"

We gotta distract him long enough to use the Elements! Pinkie Pie declared, as she fired her new muffin gun at the Fiend. "Eat delicious chocolate chip shrapnel, meanie!"

That disease you mentioned...of course! Pixie said, as she dodged a Freikugel eye laser spell and countered with a blast of Almighty energy. *Someone has to go into his mind and dispell the virus!*

I'll do it!, Nyx immediately said, as her horn glowed in preparation for the dream-walking spell.

No! That's too dangerous! Fluttershy said, as the Fiend narrowly flipped out of the way of her cone of fire breath. *We need to beat him into unconciousness,so we can-*

"And how the hee-hell are you sure that'll work?" Hee Ho asked, as he launched a massive spire of ice at Naoki's face.

Use the damn telepathic chan-

"Oh? Talking about behind my back, are you?" the Shadow asked, vanishing and suddenly reappearing behind the Black Frost. "This is for those *f*cking prices, asswipe!*" he screeched, as he punched his hoof right through the shopkeeper's head.

Holy hickory! Applejack yelled, tripping out of the way from the splatter of crainal snow. *Dangerous or not, we gotta do sumethin' now, before he ends up killin' us all!,* she stressed, as Shadow Naoki proceeded to dig into his friend's corpse.

Now or never, Nyx noted. *Keep him off my body while I handle this!* With that, Nyx's stuffed body collapsed to the ground, as her spirit flew across the room and pierced the mind of the distracted Shadow Self.

"Ghck!" he grunted, looking up from the already-melting pile of snow. "Really? You wanna fight me in *my mind*? Good luck with that, you *friggin' moron!"* Laughing again, he turned to his oldest friend. "You're next, you *self-righteous bint!*"

...

"Sheesh, cut with the melodrama!" Discord said, noticing how Rarity shoved the demon out of the way to take the brunt of the Shadow's eldritch magic. "I don't see how this is any worse than, say, that one centaur! He was going *on and on* about how he would conquer the world and everything!"

"His still-beating heart *was* delicious," Lucifer noted, licking his dry lips. "But, before I challenged him, he said something to the ponies that resonates even here."

"Yeah, yeah," Discord said dismissively. "These are the *Elements of Harmony here*! You know, those baubles that killed Sombra with one rainbow laser? The ones that stopped *me* in the height of my term of office? They can handle one little mortal!"

"No," Morning Star said, "they cannot."

"Tirek said that he was 'beyond their pitiful power of friendship to beat,'" the lord of chaos recounted. "While I do agree that their power of harmony is worthless (though even I must admit there *is* power on camraderie), he had a point."

"Yadda, yadda, yadda," Discord mumbled. "Oooh, the quilt one just went into his mind! This should be good!" he said, pulling out a pair of enchanted binoculars and staring into Naoki's mind.

"This is...going to be...hilari..." Discord trailed off, dropping the binoculars as the smirk fell from his face.

"It would appear," the mare in black noted, handing the horrified Discord back his mouth, "that his suffering goes beyond petty regrets and insecurities. A Shadow this dark cannot be so easily dispelled."

"Which brings me back to my point," Lucifer noted, as for once in his long, long life, Discord was rendered speechless by whatever he had seen. "No matter how much they would believe otherwise, and no matter ho much they cling to their ideals, they are doomed to failure."

"As, no matter how hard they try, their power of friendship *cannot* solve everything."

...

Nyx looked into Naoki's mind, and screamed.

[Nocturne], [Eiken]
Naoki… enjoys Eiken?!
Author: Gulping

Eiken.

The name alone sends shivers of dread up most Loopers' spines.

Naoki Kashima, also known as "Wait, what's tha-" to more than a few people, isn't like most Loopers.

Mostly because he went so thoroughly around the bend that it took an act of God to make him stop reacting to any form of stimulus with literally cataclysmic violence.

This gave him an almost entirely unique perspective on Eiken.

Here, he didn't have the power of the God-Killing Demi-Fiend. He didn't have the power that blindsided people eons more experienced than himself when he slammed into them in a berserk fury, surrounded by the molten remains of everything in the immediate area.

Here, he wasn't a pawn in an endless war against a broken deity in the twisted scraps left over from the apocalypse.

Here, he didn't have to put his best friends down like wild dogs when their deluded minds made them forsake their humanity and turn towards uncaring, alien beings for protection and fulfillment. Unlike himself, who had that sort of thing forced upon him after taking a blackjack upside the head and being dragged into a basement by the devil.

Here, he was just Naoki Kashima. Nothing more and nothing less.

And compared to everything else he'd been through...

This was paradise.

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – parts 14 to 15
Author: Gamerex27

While Nyx was, of course, Nightmare Moon herself, even she could still be startled. Such is the case as she backpeadled away from Princess Celestia's violated corpse.

Breathing heavily, she stared for a moment at the Princess's battered, broken, mutilated body. She wrenched her eyes away from the bloody sight. It wasn't that she was afraid: she had expected to see something that creepy when she came in here. It's just that seeing her sister/aunt/whatever not only dead, but...*desecrated* like this that startled her.

Taking a few deep breaths to calm her nerves, she looked around. She was inside Celestia's castle-likely from Naoki's memories, judging from how it was on fire. Glancing at the floor, she grimaced as she noticed six pony skulls, picked clean of fur and muscle. The presence of unicorn horns on two of them only served to confirm her fears.

"Okay. So, he killed Mommy and everypony else. And...the rest of Equestria," she said, cringing as she looked outside a shattered stained glass window at the barren and blasted landscape where Ponyville and Canterlot had once been. "And...he was like this *before* he went crazy."

"Okay, Nyxie," she told herself, "you can *do* this. All you have to do is find where his dream self is, use some purifying magic, and we can win this. No pressure."

"Do you truly believe it to be so simple, Daughter of 'Mare'?"

Squeaking in surprise, Nyx whriled around to see...well, what she supposed was the normal Naoki. A white-coated pony, covered in black stripes and markings like an elaborate tattoo display. He lacked the skeletal wings, and his coat was much more neat, but it was him.

Or at least, it *looked* like him. There was something off about him. As he cantered towards her, Nyx noted that his steps were perfectly even with one another: almost robotic in nature. His eyes betrayed no emotion whatsoever. It wasn't totally emotionless, but any feelings he did possess were guarded behind what was the mental equivalent of Fort Knox.

"You're not...him," Nyx realized, given the fact that he wasn't trying to swallow her whole at the moment. "Who are you?"

"I am Kashima. Naoki Kashima," the being replied. "The human whom you met-and are currently fighting- is my host body."

"Host?" Nyx echoed, dodging a flaming chunk of debris as they spoke. "What *are* you?"

"I am a Fiend," he replied. "A demon of death. A superweapon, crafted by my lord to kill God Himself. I am a general of the armies of Chaos, with the strength to topple empires in the blink of an eye."

"And you are *tresspassing* in our mind," Kashima continued, still in his even, emotionless tone. "Under ordinary circimstances, I would have slain you on sight. But you and I share a common goal. So you may live...for now."

"Can you help me fix whatever is wrong with Naoki, then?" she asked. "Tell me where I can find him in here, so I can get rid of that magic virus and fix all this?"

Kashima sighed, motioning for her to follow him out of the castle. "Do you truly believe his breakdown can be solved so simply?" he asked. "That you can simply undo the boy's lunacy with but a single spell? Have you, perhaps, considered that he does not *wish* to be saved?"

"We have to *try*," Nyx stressed. "If we can't stop him in this Loop, he'll just keep going and going crazy, killing everyone everywhere he goes. We *need* to stop him! *Skip* whatever

lecture you're going to give me and *help!* Because, if you're part of his mind, you're just as much to blame for all this TOO! I get enough lectures from Cheerliee as it is! Stop talking and start helping!"

Raising an eyebrow, Kashima was silent for a few moments, frowning. Nyx glared at him with more loathing than he had ever thought possible from an Equestrian. "He killed my mommy. He killed Luna. Any sympathy I would've had is *long gone*. The only reason we haven't just *killed him already* is because he's an Anchor, and he'd endanger other Loopers if we can't stop him now. We're not doing this to *save him* anymore! We're saving everyone else!"

Kashima stopped. He looked into the Everfree Forest, which they had just reached.
"So, *that* is why he's doing this?"

"What?!"

"Do you think he would have ever done any of this normally?" he asked, turning around. "Demon-human hybrids *do* massacre others when they lose control of themselves, true, but his spite? The sheer lengths he goes to to earn your undying scorn? The lectures, the taunts, the sadism, the *musical number?* It is no accident, child. The Shadow-all of the boy's deepest, darkest emotions and desires-*wants* you to hate him. He *wants* you to despise him, with all your heart."

"...Why?" she asked, confused. "Why would he-"

"-No," she cut herself off, "that's why. I've been to Igor's world: I *know* what a Shadow is. They always try to kill off their other selves, but since Loopers can't die..." she said, her eyes widening in horror.

"...he must settle for the closest thing," Kashima finished. "To make you absolutely *despise* him, on a level not seen since your Malevolent Looping Entities. To give in to such hatred that you shall kill him on sight each time you see him, forevermore. You have much pull in the Multiverse, after all. If you were, say, to warn them of a new MLE, they would listen to you. Since the Shadow cannot kill him, it must settle for the closest thing. To make all the world despise him. To ruin his life. And, even though the Loops may reset, the people in them will not."

"Oh." Nyx said softly. "I...I need to get out and warn them. But he won't just let me out, will-
"

Suddenly, Kashima reared up on his hind legs and shoved her out of the way, as the earth shook before them.

"No," he said, as both of them stared at the meteorite that had come out of nowhere and would have crushed Nyx, "he will not. I doubt that actually *succeeding* in saving my host was in his plans. I suppose he has trapped you in his mind, blocking off any attempts at communication with your companions."

"The only way to fix this is to dispel the Parasite you came in for," he concluded, as he started to walk into the forest, "so I may seize control of our body and, perhaps, regain contact with Naoki to force some sense into his foalis-*foolish* mind."

"Where is he, then?" Nyx echoed.

"This way," the demon said, motioning for her to follow. "Mind the memories."

•••

Somehow, the Everfree Forest in Naoki's mind was even creepier than the real thing. This, Nyx reflected, was probably because she and Kashima were the only living things in the forest. There were no birds chirping, no wild animals who defied the rules of nature by getting their own food, and not even any bugs. Just the two of them, moving through the woods.

"Why now?" she asked suddenly.

"Hm?"

"Why has he gone nuts now?" she continued. "Is...all of this really just spite? There has to be more to this than just...evil."

"The Shadow would tell you otherwise," the demon told her. "Recall that it wants you to despise him. It wishes to show no sympathetic traits whatsoever. But, yes, there is more to this than mere hatred.

"Have you ever had a bad day?" he asked. "Or a bad Loop? One where nothing seems to go right? Where everything you know, everything you hold dear, falls to pieces around you, and no matter what you try, you cannot stop it?"

"You're telling me this is why he went crazy?!" Nyx echoed in disbelief. "Because he had a bad day?!"

"Perhaps I am understating it," he muttered. "What is just the way of the world to me may have been...disquieting...for a human. Especially so when it never ends. And when one has another that has invaded their minds, and is constantly telling them to forsake morality and *do his damned job.*" He paused. "On second thought, I suppose I *do* see how that could become irritating. I suppose I shall have to be more...accommodating."

"The reasons don't matter," Nyx said. "I told you before: we can debate why he's doing this after we stop him."

"And that moment is upon us. We are here."

They emerged from the forest into a clearing. This was usually the area where Zecora lived-though she wasn't present here for obvious reasons. However, in place of her hut was a wooden cage. A series of runes were etched into the bars, each one glowing with power. While it looked fragile, it was doing a good job holding the captive still.

"You must excuse the makeshift prison," Kashima said, apologetically. "I was forced to improvise on the spot."

He was met by snarls and hissing-the kind of noises a wild animal would make.

Nyx stared into the cage. Chained down inside...was Naoki.

He was a dead ringer for Kashima, save for the multiple wounds and splinters caused by constant struggling against the chains holding him down. He didn't say anything: he just roared and continued to struggle against his bonds, like a beast. Honestly, a few taunts and infuriating words would have been preferable to that.

"His Shadow is not the only problem here." Kashima trotted up to the cage and stared at his counterpart. "Yes, the Shadow is his id-all of his deepest, darkest desires, the things he would never admit to himself-given form. I, meanwhile, am a separate entity entirely. A 'hitchhiker,' as he often put it. Hence why I could do nothing to fight against the Shadow, until you breached his mind and gave me a way in."

"Starting to think I should have closed the door afterwards," she muttered.

"This is also not just the Delphinus Parasite's doing," the demon continued, ignoring her. "He has, to put it simply, gone mad. Even if the Shadow is defeated, and even if you purge Asura's virus from him, he would still rampage. Such is what happens when a demonic human loses control. But not as the sociopath the Shadow has attempted to convince you he was. As a foolish, foolish Son of Man, who would, in short order, become the most hated being in all of Yggdrasil. A sad end to a tale fraught with strife, as ours is."

"Are you going to try to even stop him?!" Nyx demanded. "Because you sound like you're going to *let* all this happen!"

"I have no wish to become a pariah," the demon simply said. "I am acting out of self-preservation. It is difficult to assemble an army when everyone in the multiverse wishes you dead, after all. So, yes. I will aid you.

"I will deactivate the runes so that you can use your magics to cure the virus," he said, "whilst I keep him occupied and distracted. Will this do?"

"Do it." Nyx took a deep breath, then drew on the power of Harmony within her. Although she was inherently a creature of darkness, she was still an Element of Honesty, and therefore could still use its power. Well, she could restore what passed for sanity in this man, anyways.

Slamming his hoof on the ground, Kashima shook the cage to pieces with a massive earthquake. Right before Naoki would have pounced on Nyx, fangs bared (and, incidentally, made her glad she was made of felt this Loop), Kashima slammed into him, sending him flying in the opposite direction.

"Now!" he yelled.

Focusing, Nyx took out the scroll and began to read from it, manifesting her own Element of Harmony as the spell's focus. Although she had never cast it before, it seemed simple enough to use, and *hhrhfhfhfugfhff-*

…

"A dream within a dream," Nyx muttered, as she roused herself awake. "I should have seen this coming. I guess I'll have to kill it from the inside."

She looked around her: at the moment, she was sitting on a cloud overlooking the city of Tokyo. Right below her, she could see a human teenager walking towards a hospital. She suddenly found herself flying at him out of no will of her own (though she was *far* too used to dreams by this point to be weirded out by anything in them).

She looked at the facial features of the boy, and shuddered. While humans were never a perfect resemblance to their pony forms, for obvious reasons, she could plainly see that this was Naoki. Or, at least, the memory of him: this must be what that demon was talking about.

The scene suddenly shifted to Naoki speaking with another human in the hospital: a human girl wearing expensive clothing.

"Hey, Chiaki," he greeted her, a small smile on his face.

"Naoki," she said. "You finally made it. You know, this hospital...it's a little strange," she remarked, nervously glancing around. "There's...nobody here. Not a single person. Look, even the reception desk is empty!"

"...Yeah, I guess it *is* kind of weird," Past-Naoki said. "Sets the hairs on my neck on edge."

"Isn't it *creepy*?" She sighed. "Isamu is looking for Miss Takao right now. He hasn't come back yet, though."

"Why the hell did she come here, anyways?" Naoki asked, looking around again. "Hospitalized or not, this is like something out of a horror movie! I feel like some asshole gonna' leap out from behind the desk with a chainsaw." He laughed. "Eh, they're usually slow. We could just retreat, then find some kind of weapon or something. A bonesaw, maybe?"

"Or...we could call the police," Chiaki said, sighing again. "You watch *way* too many B-Movies."

The scene shifted again-this time to another human's entrance: this one wearing a hat Rarity would have loved to have seen, as well as some punk-style clothing.

"-even checked the men's room for her," the boy in the hat said, eliciting a chuckle from Naoki.

"I...don't think we needed to know that, Isamu" said Chiaki. "We're in the middle of a conversation, so please save the details for later."

"What's up with the conspiracy rag?" Isamu asked, pointing at the magazine in Chaiki's lap (Nyx could briefly make out several occult symbols on the cover).

"He lent it to me: something to do while we wait," she replied. "It's...kind of disturbing."

"Some nutjob pretty much shoved it down my throat, near where the park massacre happened the other day," Naoki said. "It's mostly just babble about the 'End of the world, Birth of the New One, repent all thy sins, our cult will rule over all," and that kinda crap."

"The way he says it, though..." Chiaki muttered, "it..feels ominous. And the weirdest part? It says 'A hospital on the east side of Shinjuku is closely linked to their plan.'"

"Let me guess," Isamu cut her off, "it ends with 'more to come in our next issue,' right?

"You know," he continued, "this could be the place. I've heard tons of freaky rumors about this hospital. Things like they experiment on the patients, and a psychic got scared and ran outta here. Not to mention that a cult hides around here."

"If he was *really* too stupid to leave an obvious ghost story setup right away," Nyx muttered, knowing that memory dreams can't really be interrupted by a visitor so easily, "this would explain a lot."

Chiaki shuddered. "I don't normally take this kind of magazine seriously, but-"

"Cult or not, Miss Takao is somewhere in here," Naoki cut in.

"Yeah," Isamu agreed, "we have to *try* and look for her, at least. I have to hand in that late paper *somehow*."

For a moment, the images of the three humans flashed. Chiaki's arm had been replaced by a squirming black tentacle, and her eyes had turned blood-red, Isamu had become a gigantic, amorphous, whale-shaped blob, and Naoki was suddenly in his Demi-Fiend form, adorned in tattoos and the horn on his neck.

What was *really* disturbing about all that, however, was that, for a brief moment, all three were trying to kill one another.

Then, the scene returned to normal, as if nothing had ever happened.

"Isamu, you check the third floor, since we already did the second. I'll take the basement, and Chiaki-"

"This floor," she said. "I got it. Be careful, alright?"

Naoki smiled-not an evil smirk, not a slasher's grin- but an actual, good-natured smile. "You too."

The world dissolved into blackness. Sniffing, Nyx picked up the scent of blood (something she was far more used to than she would like, due to her centuries of experience in Lemon Rush's world).

"Disease is thataway, I guess," she said, "but why the memories playbacks?"

"Listen to me!" Kashima yelled, his voice echoing all over the black void. "I doubt you can reply, but I can only contain him for so long. Follow the scent of the plague, and you shall find the infection-like a tumor, taking root in his *Horses do not have teeth that sharp, how did you do that?!*"

He hissed in pain. "Do try to not get distracted by the memories, Daughter of *BEND TO MY WILL!* You curiosity brings them to the forefront, but do not fall off the trail! Keep going: you only have so much time to *did you truly just cut off my ear with your tail?!*"

[Nocturne], [Xenoblade Chronicles], [Admin Shenanigans]
RIP AND TEAR – parts 1 and 2
Author: Gulping

As always, Shulk came to in the field, his hands on a pile of mechon scrap that he knows is housing a cantankerous crabble. He gently pulls them back, as always, to avoid aggravating the creature and provoking a wildly pointless battle. He stands, and stretches, breathing easily as he adjusts to a new loop.

Then his Monado is in his hand, and he's swinging, just in time for the divine tool to come into contact with the fist of an angry god-killer.

The residents of Colony 9 all stumble, swearing and crying out as the earth shakes and wind roars, a sudden gust blowing a cloud of dust over the town, a plume of pulverized metal and stone soaring into the sky.

Shulk clenches his teeth, a white knuckle grip on the Monado as he uses its power to massively enhance his speed and agility, leaping away from the crater where he was standing not even a second ago.

"Hah... what the... Wha-" His musing is cut off as he parries another furious blow, the force of the impact obliterating the part of the crag he's standing on.

"What is th-" *BOOM* "Who ar-" *BOOM* "Would y-" *BOOM* "Enough! BUSTER!" *BRAAAAAAAAAAM*

Shulk swings for the fences, throwing his assailant into the mountainous body of the Bionis, the impact more than enough to cause a severe rockslide. Fortunately, whatever's attacking him has managed to take him far enough away from Colony 9 to avoid collateral damage.

Well, HOPEFULLY avoid collateral damage, he amends as he leaps away from a flash of light that carves another great hole into Zanza's old trousers.

"Who in... A Looper?" Shulk's mind races as he realizes just how rogered he and everyone else would be if he couldn't pull out his own personal God-Sword on reflex. Then he considers that he still might be as he finally gets a look at his opponent. A young homs, dark

haired, around his age if not younger, and covered in markings that remind him somewhat of faced mechon. Up to and including the sinister red glow.

Actually, amending that. This glow is much more ominous than any lightshow anyone up to and including Zanza ever put out.

"_____!" And then there's the inarticulate scream of rage that Shulk swears is making the dead titans themselves shake. Possibly in fear. Somehow. Which is impressive, given the whole dead, empty husk thing.

"What... What are you?"

...

"Masakado, we have a problem."

One of the most unfortunate Admins looked up at Monad as the transparent, sexless deity came in, politely closing the door behind it.

"It's about Naoki, as I'm sure you can guess." The God of Tokyo twitched slightly at the mention of his wayward Anchor, who had gone completely mad and decided to go all walking apocalypse on everyone who had the misfortune of being anywhere near him following a disastrous incident in Equestria. Which is why he was keeping his door locked.

Sighing the sigh of those who have worked thanklessly in suffering, Masakado tore himself away from the streaming code stating that everything was just as fucked as it was ten divine seconds ago. "Let me guess, you're here to chew me out over something I couldn't actually control?"

Monad shakes its head, expression neutral as everything else about itself. "Actually, I believe that there might be a way for you to neutralize him. You were assigned to that one Branch, correct?"

"You're gonna have to be more specific. All I've had time to think about is this Amala clusterfuck. Hephaestus would be weeping if he was dealing with this kind of shit. I think that this whole mess might be fundamentally broken..."

"I was not referring to the Amala Branch. I was referring to *that* Branch."

Masakado raises an eyebrow as Monad points at something, and turns to look.

"Shulk and the Monado were able to defeat Naoki, although it resulted in a minor crash. Taking that into account, that Branch is already mostly stable, and I believe that the Anchor would be more than capable of breaking Naoki out of his madness, based on what has been established in the baseline."

"...Your brilliant plan is to have Naoki beat his head against that guy until he runs out of anger?" Masakado's tone is wildly incredulous. Monad's only response is a solemn nod.

Masakado sighs again, heavier this time. "Alright. Let's give it a shot. Not like he'd listen to me or anyone else in this state, so let's just tire him out. Could you give me a hand with this? It's going to take some precise timing and I need to boot the Branch up so we can shove Naoki into it at all."

"It would be no trouble, Masakado. I have faith that this will work, although it is not needed. Not with the man in question."

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Animorphs]
Why Subspace Pockets shouldn't store livings beings – part 1
Author: Gamerex27

My name is Langdon.

My name is Langdon Alder.

There's no point in trying to disguise my identity. The Yeerks will never get their hands on this and even if they did, it wouldn't matter beyond this Loop.

May as well get this out of the way. I am the Anchor for the Schwarzwelt portion of Amala- yes, *that* Amala, the Branch that seems like it's actively trying to ruin your day.

But, of course, that's now what most of you know me for, is it? I'm sure that the second you saw my name, you instantly thought of "the guy who found out first hand why putting living things in your Pocket is a *horrible idea."*

I've been dying to set the record straight. I am not some living textbook paragraph: I'm a human being. And after hearing apologies and pity for thousands of Loops, I've finally got the confidence to speak out about what the hell happened all those eons ago.

It happened shortly after the infamous...well, what we pulled sort of defies description. *I* don't even fully understand what we did, since the things we saw were literally beyond mortal comprehension. Whatever it was, though, it worked: no one Crashed (although we *may* have been cutting things *dangerously* close), and it all led to a karmic payback for all of us. The first Loop after all that, we all ended up together for the first time in a long while, where Skuld yelled at us and Izanagi congratulated us at the same time. Mixed messages there, Admins.

So, anyways, about a dozen Loops after that, I found myself Awakening in an awkward position.

Namely, with an angry blue centaur-scorpion's bladed tail at my throat.

<You are *not* Prince Jake,> he hissed telepathically.

"Huh?" I was still too disoriented and confused from Waking Up to come up with a coherent response (not that I'm good with words anyways. Comes with the whole "military grunt" job).

<Where. Is. Prince. *JAKE?!*>

I twisted out of the way, and felt the blade slash at my neck, just barely missing being decapitated.

"Calm yourself!" I heard a feminine voice-Isabeau's-cry. "Must I remind you that a fleet of *angry extraterrestrials* is about to-"

<All this time,> the alien hissed, <They remained here. Tobias *always* convinced the others to investigate and rescue me from this sinking prison. And I *cannot* hear him. Where is he?! Where is *Prince Jake?!*>

Wait a second, I thought. *Jake, Tobias...and he looks suspiciously like-*

"Ax!" I blurted out, before I could stop myself. Childhood memories-and I mean from my *Baseline*-dragged themselves to the surface-memories of going to the bookstore, buying those books with teenagers turning into animals on the front, and reading about their daring adventures in saving the Earth from alien puppermasters.

Of course, now that I know most fiction is actually a backup for real Branches, I realized that all those struggles were real. And, if he had just started Looping, as he had implied, and *wait there goes my arm. Ow.*

Grunting, I grabbed at my shoulder stump with my remaining hand, countless lifetimes of military training preventing me from breaking down and going catatonic from the pain. "Wait!" I yelled. "Has time been repeating endlessly for you?"

<The Groundhog Loop?> Instantly, Ax's tail was at my throat again. In the background, I could see Flynn and Superpixie in the same post-Waking haze I had been in, with Isabeau struggling to keep the doors closed and not-flooded. <What do you know of it?>

I was quiet for a moment, barely managing to use the Force to stem the blood pouring out of my side. Memories of a construction site, another Andalite, and a blue box flooded my mind. Memories that had come to me out of the blue in this new Loop. "You can let me morph and heal so I can explain," I said, agony making my voice shaky, "or you could keep trying to kill us, and never get a solid answer."

I head Ax growl in frustration in thought-speak, and he withdrew his blade. <Very well,> he said. <But when we get to land, you will tell me *everything.*>

*"*Can you not just cast a water-breathing spell to help us get out?" Flynn said, already at Isabeau's side, trying to hold the door closed.

"I have *tried*," she grumbled. "Many times. Something...Something is preventing me from utilizing my Subspace Pocket!"

"*Wonderful,"* Pixie sighed. "Should we go with the fancy new shapeshifting stuff I've got Loop Memories of?"

Ignoring pain, I nodded, and concentrated on the image of a dolphin.

For those of you wondering, yes, the Escafil Device is just as uncomfortable to use as it sounds. The twisting of bones, growing and losing new limbs, losing and gaining organs. It should be fatal. It *should hurt*. It should be agonizing. Thankfully, it isn't, but you still have to listen to those horrible sounds of your bones twisting like pretzels and stuff.

...

<I was *wondering* when you guys would get here,> I heard a familiar voice say as we surfaced, weary from dodging sharks, an angry Visser Three, and the occasional amorous dolphin.

<Naoki?>

<I'd *say* "the one and only," but it's a common name in Japan. So, I can't.>

According to my Loop memories, Unawake Naoki had taken the role of Tobias, and just like his counterpart, and managed to get himself trapped in morph.

However, I'm pretty sure that Tobias was a red-tailed hawk, and not a Hork-Bajir.

<I get that you'd be the type to go in guns...er, blade...blazing,> I asked him, <but where'd you even get the DNA for that morph?>

<Elfangor put up a hell of a fight before the Pisser took him down,> he replied, glancing at one of the many blades on his arm. <I got some of the blood on me, and next thing I know, that's the first thing I morph. I wanted to use it as a battle morph, since some bastard is messing with our Pockets, but this ain't a bad body to be stuck in.>

He leaned back on his small sailboat. "You want a lift?" he asked aloud, his usually soft and distinct voice turned harsh by the alien's rough vocal cords.

One by one, he hauled us up as we de-morphed, the process healing the many, *many* injuries he accidentally (I hope) inflicted in the effort.

"Alright," I breathed as soon as my mouth appeared. "Bird morphs to get back. Ax, I'll explain on the way.

<Oh, sure!> Naoki said sarcastically. <You take the easy way home, and leave the multi-ton walking Swiss Army Knife to take the slow way back to the coast, run as fast as these sluggish legs can take me, and hide in the woods until I can finally come into the shitty barn. Real nice of you, soldier boy!>

<Just call us on the Che-> I stopped myself mid thought. Better to not creep Ax out even more with foreknowledge, and try to ease him into it. <Uh, we'll be back later. Isabeau, you're the best with this stuff.>

<Very well, then,> she said with a mental sigh. <I wish I had the aid of my Gauntlet to explain this, but as I don't, words will have to suffice. Let me begin: all the omniverse rests on the branches of a supercomputer known as Yggdrasil...>

…

Ax had listened to the explanation in total silence, and was still quiet by the time we got back to Cassie's (Isabeau's, I guess) barn.

"...Are you...well?" Flynn asked, a few seconds after he finished demorphing.

I had to bite my tongue to stop myself from joking about Andalite pride stopping him from admitting that a more advanced race exists. I wasn't talking to a book, after all: Ax, and the rest of the Animorphs, were just as real as I was.

<It...is much to take in,> he finally replied. <As odd as it seems, your reasoning is sound, and matches with the trends Tobias and I have noted throughout the cycles-or Loops, as you say.

"Don't worry, mister!" Pixie said, slapping him on the back. "As long as you're not cursed by some giant cosmic string, you'll be able to change stuff!"

"String?" Isabeau asked. "I do not recall seeing a string during the-"

<Is there anything else different in this iteration?> Ax suddenly asked. <I seem to recall a bizarre xeno-mythology lesson from school about near-godlike aliens, but I->

"-Slept through it again?" I asked. "You have to start drinking coffee or something."

<Please stop doing that,> Ax said. <I understand that these "backups" allowed you to learn of my "Branch" many years ago, but the foreknowledge is...*unnerving*.>

"Alright," I said, holding up my hands defensively. "I'm sorry. So, what do you usually do at this point? Have you found some kind of shortcut to beat the Yeerks?"

<Before we do that, I would like to investigate this Variation. We have no way of knowing what had changed, from what I can tell, and I also wish to learn how to utilize the "Subspace Pocket.">

"Fair enough." I opened the barn doors. "We'll break for tonight, then meet up on the weekend, I guess. Been a while since I've been to school."

<Have I mentioned how cool it is to not have to go to school, but have a GED from another Loop anyways?> Naoki asked. <Because it-OW!>

"Stop being a jerk!" Pixie said, withdrawing her hand. "You've already made enough people mad with your rampage: being mean to everybody will make it worse!"

As the two began to argue, I looked at Flynn and Isabeau. Both of the shrugged, and left the barn with me.

…

-RING!- -RING!-

"Nrgh," I groaned. "F'k off, Tom," I said, going off Loop Memories. "Too early for school."

As I slowly got out of the bed, I realized that it wasn't an alarm clock going off, but a phone. One of those old-fashioned, wired ones: Animorphs really did turn out to be a period piece, didn't it?

"Hello?" I asked.

"Barn. Now!" Naoki's voice bellowed.

"Have another nightmare again?" I asked, smirking. "Just get Slaanesh to tuck you back in."

Before Naoki could launch into another rant about how shi was not his girl/boy/whateverfriend, Ax's voice came on the phone. "An alien has appeared in the city. Ci-teeeh."

That got my attention fast. "Is Crayak pulling something? Or was it that Diablous-Ex-Machina from the last bo-Uh, I mean the end of your Loop?"

"Neither," he replied. "According to Yeerk transmissions, it is called 'Dubhe.' And it is a giant ice cream cone."

"...what?"

"Ice cream. Iiiice creeeea-"

As the sound of another slap to the face interrupted him, I hung up the phone, and opened the window. "Just once," I growled, "I'd like a good vacation."

[Nocturne], [One-Punch Man]
RIP AND TEAR – part 3
Author: Gulping

Naoki Kashima was not having a good day.

Which meant that nobody was having a good day.

A rather large amount of people were not having good days as a direct result of Naoki Kashima.

Several of these people were very powerful and skilled, with abilities that came uncomfortably close to the very limits of man's ability to comprehend reality.

This immense power did not make them somehow immune to what was basically a rabid, god-eating bastard mutant spawn of a honey badger and a wolverine from coming out of nowhere and putting his fist through their important organs.

This was, of course, mostly just bad luck and being unaware that somebody was coming to put fists through their organs until he was already there.

With his fists through their organs.

Naoki Kashima can move really fast when he's more pissed off than anyone has been since the incident that lead to certain members of Yggdrasil's administration staff becoming rather a lot more professional on the job.

But this is digression, and it only really serves to illustrate that Naoki Kashima is about to make a lot of people have a very bad day indeed.

Well, he WOULD, except for the fact that before he could actually go about the business of sticking his fists through people's organs, he was interrupted, and promptly sent flying out of the city, over a mountain, through a forest, and into a lake.

•••

"Huh. That was different. That guy felt like bad news." The bald, cape-and-costume wearing man watched Naoki's figure disappear over the horizon with something resembling interest. "He didn't explode, turn inside-out, or disintegrate either. That's only happened... Twice?"

Saitama of Z-City rubbed his chin thoughtfully as he gazed off where he had just launched the Demi-Fiend, though he was unaware of the specifics regarding that identity. Granted, being unaware of the specifics was more or less Saitama's normal state of being.

Just as an example of how unaware of the specifics Saitama is? He has not yet realized he's in a time loop.

This isn't because he's stupid or anything, mind you.

This is because Saitama is strong.

Impossibly strong.

Unbelievably strong.

Through constant training and effort, he became strong.

Also all his hair fell out.

But that's not actually important to anyone besides Saitama. The important bit is that he's strong.

Saitama is so strong, in fact, that he can no longer bring himself to care.

Saitama, who wished to become a hero, who wishes to face strong opponents, cannot find fulfillment.

So Saitama, despite his incredible strength, lives a mediocre, impoverished life.

Saitama doesn't particularly care about that, though.

The giant cloud of dust, debris, and what used to be a lake rising out from where he launched Naoki Kashima, though...

"Oh."

That looks like it might merit caring.

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – parts 16 and 17
Author: Gamerex27

"Damnit...what the hell, Ms. Takao!" Naoki hissed, rubbing at the burn on his arm again. "Look, I don't wanna be rude, but your *friend* down there in the basement pulled some kind of monster out of his ass and threw fire at me! Is the school's healthcare *that bad* you had to come *here?"*

*"*I didn't want you to fall prey to that demon," Yuko Takao replied, staring out at the city limits from the hospital's roof. "But I'm just one woman. I can't stop that...I can't stop *this*..."

"Huh?"

"You heard what Hikawa said, right?" she asked. "The world is about to be engulfed by chaos. He calls it 'The Conception.' The rebirth of the world, an event which no human has ever witnessed."

"...Do you want me to get you a coffee or something?" Naoki asked, staring at his teacher like she had just grown at least a dozen extra heads. "You sound like you're still doped up on morphine."

"Please don't," she told him. "The nearest coffee shop is across the street. And everyone outside of this hospital will perish."

"It'd only take me a few-*wait, what?!"*

"I doubt anyone would approve of such a terrible thing," Yuko said, "but even if we let this old world continue to exist, it would eventually lose all of its power. The world must first die, for it to be reborn again."

"Oh, God," Naoki said, massaging his temples, "you've drank the Kool-Aid (*), haven't you? No offense, Miss Takao, but maybe you should've gone to a psyche ward instead."

"If *this* was the kind of person he looked up to," Nyx muttered, "that explains even more."

"No," she replied. "I alone must bear the sins of this world. And I have no regrets."

She walked closer to the fenced off edge of the roof, and Naoki stepped in front of her. "No. I'm not gonna let you *throw yourself off a roof* because some nutjob with an oil drum and pet monster told you to!"

"You came here," she continued, seemingly paying him no heed, "guided by fate. And it is your fate that you will live through the Conception. It may actually be more painful than death."

"Look," the boy told her, "knock all the crazy talk off. I don't wanna have to *stop* you. Please, just-"

"Listen," she said, staring past him at the city behind them "I believe in you.

"Naoki. No matter how the world changes, I'll be your strength. As the Maiden, I'll take part in the creation of a new world. I know it's difficult for you to understand."

"No, *you're* the one who's not getting it!" he rebutted. "The world's not going to go and *change* just 'cause one guy says it will!"

Yuko paused for a brief moment. "There's no point arguing," she said, finally. "Naoki, if you can find me on your own, I promise that I'll tell you everything."

And before Naoki could reply, Nyx felt a pressure building up in the air. Her entire coat stood on end, as lightning struck out of the clear sky at the horizon.

"What the hell?!"

The ground beneath them shook, as the city *stretched* into the distance. Lighting struck at each and every building in Tokyo: in another flash of light, the entire sky went dark.

Massive bolts of electricity thundered towards the ground, blackening entire city blocks with their touch. A wave of unholy light extended from the horizon, travelling through the city and draining color from everywhere it touched. The edges of the city just *vanished*, leaving nothing beyond a blank void past the city expanse of Tokyo.

While Nyx knew she wasn't in any real danger from a simple memory, she couldn't help but stare in horror at the apocalypse before her. Slowly, what was left of Tokyo-or rather, what was left of the *entire planet*-slowly *stretched* upwards, forming into a giant dome over the city.

Nyx couldn't see anything beyond that: a blinding light flashed from the unnatural sun forming under the dome, and she was left alone in the darkness.

"That...was in his *Baseline?*" Nyx murmured to herself, as she trotted forwards towards the scent of disease. The knowledge came unbidden to her: stray tidbits of information, floating around in this sad stallion's mind.

As she walked onwards, she saw dozens of small images, floating in the aether around her. All of them replayed the same thing she had just seen, sans sound: Naoki and his teacher on the rooftops, watching as the world ended. However, something was different in each image. In some, Naoki was visibly incensed, standing in a much more hostile pose and looking like he was threatening Yuko. In others, he was much more direct, shaking Yuko by the shoulders and screaming unheard words at her face. In others still, Naoki was on his knees, pleading for

his mentor to come to her senses and snap out of it. And in others, he faced down a stone-faced man with a widow's peak (likely the "Hikawa" Yuko had spoken of), lunging at him and slamming him repeatedly into a barrel-like chunk of metal, in a desperate attempt to turn it off.

But none of it worked. Not a single one.

...

Nyx had not had an easy life. Being stalked by an evil cult and the target of numerous assassination attempts can do that to a mare.

However, she reflected, at least she *had* many loved ones and friends who stuck with her, thick and thin, throughout the Loops. She was starting to see *why* Naoki had snapped. No matter where she looked, over the course of countless years worth of memories, she could not find a *single* one where Naoki stopped the end of the world or saved his friends. Even in those Loops where he had reset the world to its previous state by remaking it in the exact same image, the Loop ended mere seconds later.

"But...that doesn't make any sense," she muttered to herself, as the smell of blood and disease grew stronger the farther she walked. "I mean...if he was in that much pain for so long, how come no one helped him?"

As she turned right by several degrees to follow the scent again, she concentrated on the thought of Naoki talking about his troubles to anyone. Anyone at all.

The thousands of screens, with eons of memories, vanished in the blink of an eye. All but one.

"Really?" Nyx asked herself. "How-" she stopped herself. She looked again at the screen, as it expanded and she found herself sitting at a bar.

The moment she felt her hindquarters touch the velvet stool, she started looking around. Obviously, the asari tending the bar meant this was in Shepard's Branch. But the gaggle of demons at the tables? The succubus, making out with the elcor in the corner? The three women attached to a clock (*were those the Norn?!*) engaged in a drinking contest with the three human women sharing a single eye between them and a very drunk angel wearing bondage gear that Slaanesh would have *loved*? Must be a Fused Loop.

"Something wrong?" a dark-haired human said, as he sat down on the other side of Nyx.

Nyx restrained herself from speaking, knowing that she wasn't really here, and that he couldn't be talking to her.

"I'm fine," a voice besides him grunted. Leaning her head over the bar (and through the projection of the bartender), she saw that the speaker was a giant, hunched over, reptilian alien with a head-crest (a krogan, she thought?). One with Naoki's neck-horn.

"You've been down ever since we beat the White," the man continued. "For someone who just helped to save an entire Loop from Mechacthulhu Ascending, you seem down in the dumps."

Nyx's ears twitched. It was too early to tell, but this sounded like the Loop Mama had mentioned once when she was drinking with Shepard. The one where a crazy machine-god had tried to Ascend, and Shepard stopped him with the help of a bunch of Loopers that Mama didn't recognize. Were those Loopers from Amala?

"It's just that..." Krogan Naoki stopped, then sighed. "They know *way* too much. They give you a breaking speech too?"

"Yeah," the soldier sighed. "They're part of mankind's collective unconsciousness, like all the big shots. All despair, all self-loathing, all hopelessness, pressed into four tiny human-shaped bodies. So they know all your weak spots and all the buttons to push, which makes them a *bitch* to fight. They went *on and on* about how I'll always be trapped in the Schwarzwelt for all eternity, forced to see my squadmates all go nuts and die. But it's never *all of them*. Just a ton of people I never got to know very well, and Jimenez and Zelenin. Enough of my friends make it through that I'm not too lonely or broken up about it."

"Must be nice for you, Langdon," Naoki muttered, stirring his drink.

"...you sound a bit...resentful," the soldier noted. "I don't want to pry, but is something..."

"Other than the fact that my entire *planet* dies, and *everything* I do to try and re-make it or make a new world never sticks?" Naoki muttered, slurring his words slightly. "No. We've *all* got our demons to fight-some literal, and others in here," he said, thumping his chest. "It gets grating, but other people've got it worse."

"I've *never* seen you this sullen," his companion said, shaking his head. "Stoic, yeah, but I don't remember you getting broken up over anythi-"

"Broken up?!" Naoki muttered in a low voice. "No. No. Pixie just started Looping, so I'm *not* really alone. Not alone," he repeated, to seemingly no one in particular. "We can fix this."

"Naoki," Langdon said, his voice turning grave. "If something is wrong, you just need to tell us. Just let it-"

"Let it all out?" the krogan hissed. "What will that solve? 'Oh, woe is me, I'm caught in a time Loop where I have to go through the same things over and over again, totally alone and being forced to see all my friends die *again and again*?!' I'm no Shinji. *Every* Anchor goes through this by definition: you, me, Shepard, everyone. I know *damn well* that sitting around and bitching about how much my life sucks won't change a damn thing. Angst doesn't solve anything: action does. No point spending time whining about how much my life sucks when I have the *power* to *change it*."

"There's more to this than normal Looper cabin fever, isn't there?" Langdon guessed, moving to put his hand on Naoki's shoulder. "If something's wrong, you can just ask for our help?"

Naoki was silent for a few moments.

"...do you know how rare Fused Loops are? I've *counted* how many Loops I've spent outside of my home Loop. You know how many? Somewhere around *5%*. Of *all* the Loops I've been through for *billions* of years. 4% was with you guys. So, I appreciate the offer, but you guys only come along so rarely that you may never *get* the chance to do it yourselves. I need to do this on my own."

"Listen to me, damnit-"

"I'm. Fine," the Demi-Fiend hissed.

"No, you're not!' Langdon shouted suddenly, grabbing the krogan by the shoulder. "I'm no doctor, but I know shell shock when I see it! You need a Loop with the Invesrigation Team, or the ponies, or some other Sanctuary-"

"Always with the *fucking ponies!"* Naoki screamed back. "SHUT UP ABOUT THEM FOR FIVE MINUTES. GOD DAMNIT, *I'M FINE!*"

And before Langdon could reply, Naoki slipped a gemstone out of his sleeve, and pressed down on it, vanishing in a flash of light into a small, one-man ship.

"I'M FINE!" he screamed again, yelling at no one. "I'm....fine. I'm fine. I'm *fine*. *I'm fine*..."

He was silent for some time, panting and clenching and unclenching his fists repeatedly. He stayed that way until the memory faded to oblivion, and Nyx found herself ever-closer to the Delphinus Parasite.

Naoki loses it FINALE and Miscellaneous 6

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Naoki loses it – FINALE
Author: Gamerex27

"For *fuck's sake, Chiaki, listen to me! Don't go near the statue!"*

"Isamu, shut the fuck up about how everyone should leave everyone else alone! You know damn well that's bullshit!"

"Yuko, don't!"

"STOP IT!"

"DON'T YOU DARE DIE ON ME AGAIN!"

"PLEASE!"

Phrases like these echoed all throughout the void as Nyx came close to the bulging mass of flesh that *had* to be the parasite she was looking for.

She had come in hating Naoki-he had murdered her mommy, tried to kill her and all her friends, and was generally being a plothead. But, was all this really his fault?

"Maybe," she said to herself aloud. "I mean, he *does* have a terrible life. He did everything he could, everything he could think of to save his friends, and none of it worked. Not through any Loop at all. But he should have told *someone*. I mean, maybe he could have fixed this if he swallowed his pride and *asked for help!* Maybe he didn't want to whine, but if he had *mentioned this at all*, I wouldn't be here, and Mommy wouldn't be dead!"

She took a deep breath, and wracked her brain for the spells she needed to purge this virus. "One way or another, I'm *ending this*. *Vas Mani. An Nox. In Mani Corp...*"

…

"Ha...ha...ha..." Shadow Naoki gasped, as he narrowly dodged a blast of holy light from Rarity's dress powers. "Kinda sad, really. All your eons of experience, and you can't beat one guy? No, scratch that: you *can,"* he realized, firing bolts of pure magic at the tired and *very angry Equestrians. "*You're just too cowardly and *obsessed* with your *Sanctuary* that you can't admit to yourselves that some people are *beyond saving*. I don't *want* your help. I don't *need* your help. And if I need to hammer this lesson into your stupid heads, then-"

"JUST SHUT UP ALREADY!" Something in Fluttershy's brain snapped. In a split second, she dropped out of her dragon form and slipped right into her Flying Hatred persona. "NOPONY CARES ABOUT THAT!" she screeched, launching herself at Naoki's Shadow Self to impale him on her horn.

"GHK-" the monster was cut off mid rant when Flying Hatred's horn pierced his barrel.

"DIE!" Fluttershy screeched, as she knocked Naoki to the ground and proceeded to ram her forehooves all over his body. "JUST DIE! DIE! *DIE!* LEAVE US ALONE AND *DIE!*"

Responding with a laugh, the Fiend pushed himself to his shaky hooves and blasted Fluttershy with a pair of eye lasers. "You sound just like my *friends*," he sneered. "Trying to help me and support me one second, then stabbing me in the back and trying to kill me for all time the next! I work my *ass* off trying to save them time and time again, and *for what?! NOTHING!* That *friendship* you depend on is a *lie!* Your friends will leave you when it's best for them, and land you along for all-"

"Shut. Up."

The voice wasn't that loud, but the attempt to try and counter his lecture got Shadow Naoki's attention enough that he turned to eh speaker.

But, right as he opened his mouth to respond, Nyx unleashed all the healing magic that she possessed and eradicated the parasite from Naoki's mind.

It was a momentary distraction, one that temporarily made him pause as he was forced to re-evaluate his plans.

But a second was all Gilda needed, as she tackled Naoki's possessed body right through the Domain's walls, overwhelming his power and control over the pocket dimension with the sheer power of her holy might.

"I'm going to put these in human terms," she said slowly, "since you seem to be too *stubborn* to listen to anything else. Shut. The. Fahck. *Up!*" she said, not even caring that she had gotten the pronunciation of the foreign cuss wrong. "I don't *care* about what you've supposedly suffered. What you've been through. You don't have *any right* to push us around and try to kill us just because you have a bad Loop-"

"Wha-" the Shadow's eyes widened, as the parasites' absence returned the smallest sliver of Naoki's rationality to his mind. Not enough to stop howling and raging like a beast inside his mental prison, but just enough to subconsciously hear Gilda.

"*So what* that your friends keep leaving you?!" she hissed. "*Make new ones!* News flash! You're *in a Time Loop!* And it's *not* going to change, it's *not* going to get better, *no matter what you do*!

"So quit your whining and just **move on**," she bellowed into his ear. "You had people that are Looping with you, and you *ignored them* to obsess over some other people! You are the most *selfish, bull-headed idiot I have ever met!* If you are *too stupid* to just see that you *can't change some things* and let it go, then you're not really *Looping*, now, are you?! You're just as *static* and *blind* as any other Sleeping *idiot out there!*"

"No," the Shadow breathed, his eyes widening in fear. "No, no, no! Stop it! Stop talking!"

He shoved Gilda off of him, but she kept on talking. "You aren't any better than any Bureau member," she continued. "You're plugging your ears and ignoring what's right in front of you to make sure that you won't see what you're doing will *fail! Grow up!* You're not some genius, deconstructing our ideas and rubbing our mistakes in our faces! You're a *child who is whining about the clock getting stopped!"*

"No, no, no, shut up, YOU WHORE!" the Shadow screeched. "SHUT UP! YOU WON'T SAVE HIM, YOU *WON'T SAVE HIM,* ***YOU WON'T SAVE HIM!"***

"And NOW you're just some nutjob babbling crazy talk!" she said, as the other Loopers flew and ran out of the hole in the rapidly-collapsing Domain to follow her. "We were *going* to help you, but you *bucked it up!* So, yeah, we're *going to kill you now, and make sure you can't hurt any other Loopers ever again!"*

"SHUT UP!" the Shadow screamed at the top of his lungs. "You won't save him."

His face twisted into a mad grin.

"I won't *let you*," he said triumphantly, as energy gathered around his body.
"Adios, *assholes!*"

And then, he blew himself up.

…

And then he blew hi5el7f$*%&$(@@*#Y

In the blink of an eye, Fluttershy went from the scorched and blasted battlefield outside of the fairgrounds to a familiar frozen landscape, dotted with frozen valleys. Stumbling around, she automatically shifted into a wolf to survive the blistering cold, and the haze at the start of a new Loop cleared.

"That...that's *it?!*" she demanded as soon as she could speak. "Gilda makes one speech, and you *rage quit?! ARGH!*"

Fluttershy howled in rage for a few moments. Somewhere in the back of her mind, a little voice was telling her that she should be *panicking* for some reason or another.

But she was too ticked off to listen. She sent out a Ping, but only got one response, *deep* in the Immaterium. So, clearly Leman had yet to Awaken. Sighing, she slowly walked forwards, quickly finding Leman's pod by scent.

"Great," she muttered, "now I have to wait *years* before I can talk to my son again. Buck you, Naoki," she hissed, as she dragged the pod out of the snow in her powerful jaws. "*Buck. You.*"

"What's wrong, my dear girl?" said a voice from behind her.

Fluttershy instantly wrinkled her nose in disgust, as the awful smell of death, decay, and dozens of diseases yet to be discovered anywhere except this Branch reached her. "Hello, Nurgle," she sighed, turning around to face the plague god.

"I suppose it's fruitless to ask if you're feeling Loopy," he continued. "I don't think I've ever heard your ponies' Ping quite that loudly. I take it Leman..."

"Is still sleeping," Fluttershy confirmed. "At least, I hope so. Twilight Woke Up in a situation like this once, and she drank herself into a week-long coma because of it."

"And you're that upset too?" Nurgle sat down on a snowbank, looking Fluttershy in the eye. "Now, what's the matter."

Fluttershy deeply sighed, before pulling some alcohol-infused tea leaves out of her Pocket and set a fire to begin making a drink she *really* needed. "We met this new Malevolent Looping Entity. His name is Naoki Kashima, and he's a *monster*. He..."

•••

Nyx Awoke (and awoke) in her bed.

For a few moments, she just sat there. Wasn't she just somewhere else?

She idlly tapped her hoof against a bedpost, trying to remember what she had been doing. The last thing she remembered was casting a lot of spells at a giant ball of-

Oh. *Oh.*

She sprang out of bed as fast as she could, sending out a flurry of Pings. She got several responses: a Magic, a Kindness, a Loyalty, but it *didn't matter she had to find them now!*

There was still time. If she found them before they could tell anyone, she could *stop them and save him.*

•••

The doors to Big Mac's bar flew open, and Nyx touched down on the doorstep, panting. The bar's proprietor glanced at her for a moment, then shrugged, muttering something about backup doors and Make Whole rituals.

"...looks about right" Rainbow Dash said, lounging back on her barstool. "We've got a few new Loopers, Silver Spoon's species code got messed up in that Crash, and there was the incident a few dozen Loops back they covered pretty good." She slid the magazine over to Fluttershy, then took a swig of her drink. "This magazine is pretty awesome. You don't have to wait, like, a thousand years to figure out who's signed up for an inter-Looper race or not!"

No. *No.*

"I *guess* so," Fluttershy said. "Speaking of a race, that bird-feeder I was working on might have been raided by Gilda. I told her, she *can't* have the birdseed, but she didn't listen, and now the poor little hatchlings' stomachs are growling loud enough to be a new song in their choir. Can you help me find her?"

"She's now Awake this Loop, Shy," Dashie muttered as she got up from the stool. "Sometimes, it's kinda easy to forget that some Loopers aren't always Awake. I mean, the Anchor is, and they remember *everything*, and Twi's told me a hundred times how frustrating it is to just wait out Lonely Loops until one of us Wakes Up to work on a project or prank someone."

"Well, Unawake ponies are still ponies," Fluttershy said, also getting up, "so Twilight's never *really* alone. Um, excuse us, Nyxie, we wanted to leave, and Big Mac doesn't like it when we break through the windows to get-"

"No, *no, NO!*" Nyx shrieked, falling to a sitting position and hyperventillating.

"Sheesh, if it's that annoying," Dashie said as she reached for the door handle, "you can just ask Big Mac to make them easier to open. It's really hard to grab a handle that small without fingers, and I guess it *is* kinda-"

"How...*how many Loops has it been?!*" Nyx asked, breathing speeding up even more along with her heart rate.

"Since...what?" Fluttershy asked, tilting her head. "Oh, do you mean the last time you were Awake the same time as us? It must have been...around six hundred Loops ago," she said, tapping her chin thoughtfully with her hoof.

"Wasn't that when we ran into that *plothead* new MLE?" Rainbow Dash said, groaning.

"Yes. *Naoki*," Fluttershy said, with the same tone of voice one would use to describe a mass-murdering serial killer. "I told Twilight the second we Woke up in the same Loop, along with Lemon and some other Loopers. That *is* how we're supposed to deal with MLEs, right?"

"I think so. Remind me to tell Sleipnir to yell at whoever's Admining that moron to-"

"It *wasn't his fault!*"

Both mares stopped talking, and stared at the Nightmare. "What?" both of them said.

"It...the Nightmare Force goaded him on, his Shadow took control, he was totally alone, and-"

"Wait, wait, hang on," Rainbow Dash said, sharing a confused glance with Fluttershy. "What do you mean, 'it wasn't his fault?'"

"Did we overlook something when we put up the warning?" Fluttershy said, in a tone even softer than her usual speaking voice. "Was...was someone trying to *frame him?* Is *that* what you're saying?"

"He WAS framed!" Nyx said, tears welling up in her eyes. "You...*we fell for it!* He wanted him *alone forever* and we *helped him*!"

Nyx's choked sobs turned into full-fledged crying. Before Fluttershy could move forward to comfort Nyx about her troubles, she vanished.

"...I've got a *really* bad feeling about this," Dashie moaned, her face turning pale. "If...if he *wasn't responsible...*"

"We need to give her some space for a while," Fluttershy said, her gut clenching as she realized that she may have made a terrible mistake. "Maybe he put some illusions in his mind to fool her...but we can't ask her what happened now. There's only one pony she wants to be with right now..."

...

Twilight was reshelfing the bookshelf when something on her mother radar went off.

Turning her head, she saw Nyx sitting in the corner, crying. Dropping the book and walking over to her daughter, Twilight gave a Fluttershy-grade hug which Nyx shrugged off, crying even more.

Twilight shook her head, already knowing that this was not going to be a good day if her daughter was feeling this bad about something she did. Turning her around and bringing out Smarty Pants, Twilight covered her beloved daughter with a wing and waited for her sobs to stop.

Finally, after a long time Nyx stopped crying, wiping her puffy eyes with her hoof, the other one tightly clenched around the doll that Twilight still had in her long lonely loops without any of her friends.

"Ready to tell me what's wrong?"

"We did a very bad thing, Twilight." Nyx spoke softly.

Twilight? Not momma, mom, mother, or anything else? This was *very* bad news. The ice ball in her stomach grew larger.

"What did we do, Nyx, that was so bad?" Twilight knew she didn't want to hear the answer, that this peaceful loop would be lost forever.

"Do you remember Naoki?" Twilight winced at *that name:* that very dangerous, insane, murderous anchor. The horrible things he had done to her and her friends. She had never seen Fluttershy so *angry*, and no one hurt her friends and got away with it.

"It's alright," Twilight said in a motherly voice, though hesitantly. "We've already warned as many Loopers as we could. He can't hurt anyone any-"

"*Stop!"* Nyx ordered in her other voice, the voice of Nightmare Moon. "I-" She hiccuped, wiping her snout with the napkin Twilight instantly summoned for her. "It *wasn't* his fault, momma."

Twilight heard the doors to her treehouse creak open, followed by the other Elements of Harmony walking in.

"Y'allright, Nyx?" Applejack asked, uneasy.

"Do you want to talk about it, dear?" Rarity asked. "We're here for you, and we always will be."

Sniffling again, Nyx climbed to her hooves, walked over to one of Twilight's armchairs and collaped into it.

"Do...do you know what a Shadow is?" she asked meekly.

"Oh! Oh!" Pinkie Pie said, bouncing up and down. "Isn't it a kind of Heartless? The ones made of mousse that melt into the floor?"

"No," Nyx said, rubbing at her eyes with her forehooves, "not that kind. From the Persona Branch. A *Jungian* Shadow."

"...What is it, then?" Rarity asked.

"It...it's all the bad stuff in a person. All their darkest secrets, all the things they think but never want to say to anyone, all their self-loathing, all of the things they hate about themselves and try to deny," Nyx said, hanging her head. "And in that Branch, a Shadow can exit its self's body and try to kill them in the right conditions to take their place."

"...But what's this gotta do with *Naoki*?!" Applejack asked.

"I went into his mind," she said, after blowing her nose into the tissue, "and it *knew*. It *knew* about the Loops, it *knew* that it couldn't kill Naoki-not forever. So...so it wanted to do the next best thing...ruin his life."

"...But...that would mean-" Rainbow said, then stopped, as the full implications of Nyx's experiences hit her like a runaway train.

"When he was on the moon, the Nightmare Force tried to take over his body," Nyx said, tears welling up again, "and the Shadow used its power to take control of Naoki. And it wanted to ruin him by making everyone *hate him!*

"In his Loop," she said, sniffling, "he was *almost always* alone. The world *ends* in the first half-hour, and he's never been able to stop it. All that's left are ghosts, demons, and three of his friends. But no matter what he did, those friends always ended up *dying*! They went insane in the Vortex World, and he had to *kill them every Loop!* He tried *everything*-I could see *everything*-and none of it *worked!* And, somehow, he *never had a single Variant*, and had so little Fused Loops I can *remember* how many there were! He only had *one other constant Looper, and she was barely ever Awake!*"

"But how...what'd the Shadow..." Pinkie Pie said, trailing off as her ever present smile slowly vanished from her face.

"It *wanted* us to hate him!" Nyx yelled, sobbing into her armrest. "It *wanted* us to hate him with everything we had! It *wanted* us to tell Yggdrasil that he was a monster, a *thing* to be killed *on sight!* Even if he got out of his Loop, and *even if* he tried to ask someone for help, *no one would! It wanted him to be* ***dead to the world!***"

The entire room was silent. No one could think of anything to say. And who could, when confronted with something this disturbing.

"And we helped it," Nyx concluded. "It crashed the Loop before I could get out of his mind. And the next time you Awoke...you did your jobs and warned other Loopers!"

"It...it was using us," Dashie realized. "It never wanted to kill us, or our friends, or anypony at all. Just means to an end."

"All it wanted was to ruin Naoki's life," Nyx concluded. "And you, Momma, and all the others...you helped it. You didn't know, you *couldn't know*...but now it's too late."

"Oh sweet Celestia, no." Twilight gasped, falling back into her old habits of language at she realized what she and her friends had done. All their victories, and all their successes, and they still *failed*. They found someone who *needed* help, more than *anything*, and they made it worse. And now no one else *would* help.

What had they *done?*

[Nocturne], [Warhammer 40000], [Bar loop]
April's Fools
Author: Evilhumour

Naoki stumbled into the bar, shuddering violently as he constantly looked over his shoulder. Ryu blinked in concern with the rest of the other loopers at this strange behaviour and inquired what was making him so jumpy and worried.

"It's Slaanesh!" He all but shouted, afraid saying hir name would summon the chaos god. "Shi came to me, fully *dressed* in *appropriate* clothing, told me that shi has something big planned for me, *gave* me some clothes to cover up and then shi left without making a single lewd comment or gesture! I've got *no* idea what the hell is going on or what shi's planning and it's scaring the crap out of me!"

There was silence in the bar until someone coughed and slid a calendar over to the anchor. He stared at the date for a moment before he started to curse and crash the loop.

[Persona 4], [My Little Pony]
My Little Persona – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

"How's everyone holding up?" Yu asked as he sat down in the school's cafeteria with the rest of his friends.

"Don't you mean 'every*pony hoofing up?*'" Yukiko asked, biting back giggles again.

"Yeah, that got old after the first dozen pony puns," Daisy Kicker/Chie groaned, sliding down in her seat.

"I dunno about you guys," Kanji said with a grin, "but this is *friggin' awesome!* I can *f__ing fly*, and everything's *so cute* that I could *explode!"*

"Whatever floats your boat," Yosuke muttered, taking a bite out of his daisy sandwich, and wincing at the taste. "Ugrh. Reflex and memories says it tastes good, but it's a *flower*. It just feels *weird eating one*."

"I haven't been in the Loops for long," Beautiful Mind/Naoto admitted, sipping her wheatgrass juice, "but I can't say I've been in a Loop this strange. We've been outside Inaba before, but this is the first time I wasn't..."

"Human?" Yu guessed.

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "It's odd...they don't have hands, yet they can still use tools, books, utensils, and more with their hooves. They're descended from a herd species, but they still have Western-based schooling, government, and social systems in place. It's brighter and more colorful than Earth, but judging from a lot of the cases I helped to investigate prior to Waking Up, there's still just as many tragedies, crimes, and dark spots in this society, too. Different...yet the same."

"Well, *duh*," Yosuke snorted. "I mean, Americans made the show for girls Nanako-chan's age. I think. I don't watch it!" he quickly added.

"Yosuke-sempai, you *know* that's not true," Rise replied. "All those shows are just Yggdrasil's backups. They're just as *real* as we are."

"The implications of every work of fiction ever being a real place are...disturbing," Naoto interjected, rubbing at her forehead with a forehoof. "But let's not get into that. The Loop lasts for five years-"

"HELL YEAH!"

"...as I was saying," the detective continued after Kanji's enthusiastic interruption, "it lasts for five years. That's several years longer than the Baseline when we usually Wake Up, so we should be able to enjoy the peace and continue whatever experiments we're working on. What's everyone up to?"

"Trying to figure out Persona Fusion," Yu replied, in between mouthfuls of noodles. "Igor won't help with it, so all he's been doing is giving me hints on how it *might* work."

"I'm just trying to catch up on all the anime," said Yosuke. "It...kinda sucks I'll run outta it eventually, though Teddie complains about it more."

"Hey," Chie asked, "where IS Teddie? I didn't see him anywhere in the school."

"Maybe he's the Ursa Major?"

"...I thought you didn't watch the show, Sempai," Kanji said with a smirk.

"Uh...I...saw it in my Loop Memories?" Yosuke said, blushing and suddenly becoming much more interested at staring at his flowery lunch than looking his friends in the eye.

"There's nothing to be ashamed about watching it, Yosuke," Yu said with a smirk.

"Look, Partner-I don't-"

"You ain't foolin' nobody," Kanji said, rolling his eyes as he turned back to the. "Look, it's ain't half bad, even dubbed."

"I *said* I don't-"

"Aw, horsefeathers. Somepony's sitting at our table."

"Ah, well. Mind if we sit with you?"

The Investigation Team turned around to see the Cutie Mark Crusaders, carrying lunch trays with their horns/wings/mouths.

"Sure, why not?"

"Thnks," Applebloom muttered, as she sat down and spat out her tray. "Y'all are other Loopers, right? Where y'all from?"

"Amala," Kanji said before anyone could stop him. "The Per-"

Before he could continue, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo swiftly grabbed their chairs and scooted them several spaces back from the group.

"Really?" Applebloom asked. "Y'all *remember* what Nyx told us, right?"

"Oh...sorry," Scootaloo grinned apoligetically, scooting back to the table. "Instinctive reaction. Things *are* better there now-right?"

"Oh, look, a *blank flank convention,"* Silver Spoon said, interrupting them all.

Sighing, the entire table turned as one to glare at the two bullies.

"Well, well, well," Diamond Tiara said, "looks like you're as stupid as ever. Seriously," she said, nosing on Kanji's work by poking her head over his shoulder, "knitting? You're a *stallion* and you're *knitting?* How *sad* is it that you're trying to get a Cutie Mark for *girl stuff?"*

"You talkin' to me?" Kanji said softly.

"*Really sad,*" Silver Spoon, laughing. "May as well go grab a dress or a boyfriend while you're at it."

"...are you *talkin' to me*?" Kanji asked, dropping his doll and needle and climbing off his chair. He stretched himself up to his full (impressive for a colt) height, towering over the

bullies.

"I said..." he continued in a dangerous tone, as lightning cackled around his body and his Persona Takeji Zaiten spontaneously manifested in the background, hovering over the ponies' lunches, "Are. You *Talkin'. **TO. ME?"***

The two mares promptly did a total 180 in composure, as their knees turned to jelly and their smug grins were replaced by looks of sheer terror. "Uh....no?" Silver Spoon managed to squeak, shrinking in on herself to avoid this crazy stallion and his gigantic monster.

"Cool," Kanji said, climbing back into his seat and finishing the final stitch on the stuffed bear he as knitting.

"Still," he continued, dropping the doll and needle, and the Cutie Mark Crusaders held in their laughter, "*scram*."

They didn't need to be told twice, as they reached sub-Rainboom speeds running away.

The three native Loopers looked at each other for a second. then cracked up.

"Kanji" Rise groaned, "wasn't that a bit harsh? You *really* couldn't think of a better prank?"

"Hey, I've never been good at that kinda stuff," Kanji muttered, grinning. "May as well do what I'm used to. 'Cept this time, the assholes I'm scaring off *deserve it*."

"So, do you guys have any more ideas for pranks?" Sweetie Belle asked, as her friends were still too indisposed laughing their flanks off to rejoin the conversation.

"I was...kinda thinking i'd flirt with 'em to make them uncomfortable," Yosuke admitted, "but my partner beat me to it. Guess it's back to square one to me."

"Oooh!" Chie said, snapping her hoof (then staring at it for a few seconds, wondering how the hell she had done that). "Why don't we go find Teddie! We've done all sorts of funny stuff with his suit on Adachi!"

"No matter where you go," Yu agreed, "people are alwasy creeped out by a hollow bear suit."

"Again," Naoto said, "the more things change...the more they stay the same. Now, I don't like to brag, but I was thinking my idea would best be saved for last. Here's my plan..."

[Digital Devil Saga], [My Little Pony]
Atma Variant: Herbivore (title added by compiler) – part 1
Author: Gamerex27

Sweetie Belle sniffled, as she lay on her back in her bed. It was around this time that she Awoke. No matter which healing magics she poured over, the disease didn't seem to go away.

"Sweetie?" Rarity asked, from outside her closed door. "Are you Awake?"

"Yeah," she confirmed, then blew her nose. "In both senses of the word."

"Wonderful." Rarity cautiously opened the door. "Er...it's a Fused Loop. With an Amala Branch."

Sweetie blinked. "What's bad about that?"

"You don't-" Rarity stopped herself, then exhaled. "I suppose there's no getting around what happened. But *he's* not here, so it can wait for later. It's with the one where Seraph is from. Or Serph and Sera, if they haven't fused together yet. And...they brought along a virus with them."

"An...inter-Loop virus?" Sweetie Belle asked, as she felt a *massive* sneeze coming on. "Ah...ah...what is it?"

"They're calling it Atma, and it causes you to-"

"AH-CHOOOOO!"

Glowing lines and veins spread from her face to cover every part of Sweetie Belle's body. She was evneloped in line after line of glowing computer code, as the word "APSARAS" ran over her eyes.

Eventually, the light faded, and...well, she wasn't *blind*, but her eyes were gone. Sniffing again, Sweetie realized that her sinuses were clear. Also that she was currently seeing through scent.

"-turn into a demon," Rarity finished. "At the moment, I'm just thankful that it's not the *normal* kind that causes you to eat people."

"...eat...people?" Sweetie Belle asked. Wait...her mouth wasn't where it should be. Opening and closing it again, she realized that...it was on her *forehead*? And...she had the oddest craving for...for...

"Er...hang on a moment," she said, pulling a note from her Pocket. "'Atma Variant Strain:Herbivore. Rather than surviving off of Magnetite found in human bodies, infectees of this strain of the virus are compelled to-'"

In the span of a split second, Sweetie Belle jumped from her bed, crashed through her window, and flew towards their new backyard with the wings that had replaced her forelegs. Opening her forehead mouth wider than it should have been able to, she proceeded to tear out a chunk of the tree with her teeth, swallowing the bark whole.

"'-Eat the cellulose in plant organisms,'" Rarity finished. "I *suppose* it could be worse, but..."

•••

"-Everypony, calm down!" Ivory Scroll yelled over the rabble.

"Calm down?" one of the ponies near the front said, incredulously. "I'm tucking my colt into bed one second, then I've *eating* the bonasi I gave him as a birthday present the next!"

"We're going to go out of business!" Mr. Cake screamed. "If everypony is too busy eating trees, how are we going to keep the bakery open? How are we going to pay our bills?!"

Near the back of the town hall, several ponies with technicolor manes and eyes glanced at one another.

"I do not comprehend," said the green one. "Consuming cellulose to gain Magnetite is a *far* more favorable alternative to consuming human flesh for the same material. Why, then, is everyone, as Cielo put is, 'flipping out?'"

"Oh, I don't know, Gale," muttered the pink one, "maybe it's because they're *turning into monsters*, and the only way for them to live is to *eat all of their surroundings?!*"

"They...also don't know *why* all this is happening," the silver/black..mare?...stallion?...*pony*- let's go with that- said. "This is what it must have been like when all of this happened on Earth."

"At least de sun isn't doin' all it dis time, ja?" the purple and yellow one said. "...and when'd ya bring 'I do not comprehend' back?"

"...for old times sake."

"Look," Ivory Scroll stressed, "this is a simple problem to fix. All we need to do is start growing more barked-plants, and maybe some trees, speed it up with earth pony magic, and ask Princess Aditi-um, Princess *Celestia* to go to the Sun and stop it from transmitting the viral data to Equis!"

"...data?" the audience asked in unison.

"...never mind," Ivory Scroll muttered, as her stomach growled. "But...in the meantime...I have a solution!"

In a burst of light, the mayor shapeshifted into her demon form.

"I thought of a way to sate our appeties until then!" she announced. "EVERYPONY, LET'S *EAT THE EVERFREE!*"

"YAAAAAAAAY!" all but one audience member cheered in unison!

"NO!" The lone dissenter pleaded. "If you do, all those poor animals will be homeless!"

"Don't care, hungry!" Pushing past her, the native ponies slowly filed out of the meeting hall. Once they were all gone, Fluttershy sighed and stared at the other Loopers in the room.

"Okay...okay," she said, sighing. "I'm...going to teleport to the forest and start evacuating all the animals. It doesn't look like they're interested in eating them, anyways. I'll just move them into the portable forest I've been working on. Could you..."

"...help?" Seraph finished. "It *is* our fault all this happened. We're Patient Zero, after all." Shi nodded. "Yes, we'll try and help out."

"...and promise not to eat any of them?" Fluttershy added. "I *know* how Atma usually works, and your strain...is less pleasant."

"We possess sufficient Titan Meat in our Pockets to feed us for several thousand Loops to come," Gale told her. " As well as a stockpile of crystalized Magnetite, taken from the main Branch. As long as we stop for several 'snack breaks,' we shall be able to control ourselves."

"...but we don't even *need* to do that this time," the pink one pointed out. "That tree house we found earlier was big enough to sate our hunger."

"...that, too, should alleviate your concerns," Gale agreed.

"Good," Fluttershy said. "Seraph...you can still use that calming song, just in case all this gets out of hoof?"

"Yes, but I'm going to need some kind of amplifier to affect so many people all at once. There's no electricity here, so a microphone won't work." Seraph sighed. "I hate to ask, but could you..."

"I'll ask Rarity what she can whip up." Fluttershy said, already cantering out the door. "By the way," she said, turning around, "*try* not to eat any more tree houses while I'm gone. Twilight is *still* mad that you guys ate the Golden Oaks."

[SMT I], [Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV]
Futsuo's Nut Cracker Awakening
Author: Gamerex27

Slowly, Flynn and Isabeau turned as one to stare at Langdon. "Why?" the Anchor of the two simply asked.

"Look, Cage's movies have never been *good*," the American soldier said, frowning, "but they're usually *better than this*. I thought we would like it. Y'know, celebrate after the whole incident with angels invading Leman Russ's wedding. Maybe he's lost his touch after millions of years Looping...Naoki, why are you clutching the remote like that?"

"'Cause the movie's so bad, it *has* to be haunted," the demon muttered. "If this turns out like Ringu and Cage climbs through the screen to (try and) kill us all, I'm changing the channel."

That is far from sound reasoning, Kashima whispered from within his mind, echoing to the group.

"Eh," Naoki said, shrugging, "let me have my fantasy. It's a lot more interesting than *this*. Yo, new guy, how you holding up?"

The group turned to the brown-haired boy in cobbled-together armor and a massive, unweildly metal gauntlet on his arm. He shifted in place uncomfortably.

"...I'm still trying to get used to all of this," Futsuo admitted. "I mean, Time Loops? Admins? Pockets? Edits? I thought the world getting blown up, summoning demons, and killing gods was weird enough. Kind of scary, to know I'll have to do all that over again."

"...We're not going to let you go through the same things we did," Naoki said, smirking.

"You're not alone," Isabeau added. "None of us are."

The (possible) reincarnation of Adam pondered this for a moment, then smiled.

"Thanks," he said. "At least I've always got Pascal and...her...by my side, too. Shame the movie sucks, though."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Persona Q]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

When Igor found out what he had missed during the Typhoon of 2009 as well as after the Culture Festival of 2011 was a bit surprising. However, he had admitted that the nullifying of the Wild Card in certain areas had made an interesting experience, even more-so on those rare occasions where everyone is Awake.

"Hmm..." Igor muttered. "Those who don't have the contract has a minor variation. Now I'm reminded of the first two moments that it happened. Tatsuya might luck out, but Naoya and Maki..."

He then cleared his throat.

"I'm muttering to myself," he said. "Now I remember why I usually have assistants...speaking of...ah, welcome to the Velvet Room. Especially those who don't originally have a contract."

"Igor," Yu replied, looking around and noting that the head count was different...and there was a massive ping from everyone. "And I guess everyone's here...more than everyone..."

The blue-haired male groaned. "Usually, we DON'T show up at the same time," he replied. "And...Narukami."

"Arisato," Yu said. "Nice to see you again."

Yosuke then cringed. "I'm still surprised that he and I sound alike," he said. "Nice to see you again, Junpei."

"Same here," Junpei replied. "I'm still surprised that we're meeting again...what is this?"

Igor then chuckled. "I assume you're not talking about the Velvet Room?" he asked the groups. "I may have missed this the first time, but not only am I here this time, I can assist with extra fusions this time."

"Oh, you mean up to Hexogonal Fusions?" Yu asked him.

"That reminds me," a gruff voice muttered. "Who's the grey-haired girl?"

"You must be Shinjiro Aragaki," the woman replied, wearing a Yasogami High uniform. "Nice to meet you in person. My name is Labrys, and I'm an Anti-Shadow Surpression Weapon of the Fifth Generation."

"You're like Aigis, then," Shinjiro replied. "Still, what's with the uniform?"

"Long story," Mitsuru said. "And...talk about familiar faces you never see again..."

The young man with the yellow scarf blinked as he looked around...then grins.

"Well, this is a surprise," he said. "I'm usually not around until AFTER the Bridge, but being here in person this time is a new development."

"Sensei," a voice said, the bear coming over to Yu Narukami, "What IS that!?! He looks human, but my nose is sniffing a super-dangerous Shadow!"

"That's just Ryoji," Akihiko said.

"Sorry if I scared you," Ryoji said to Teddie. "Still, it's nice to meet a young Shadow like yourself."

"HOW DO YOU..."

"Teddie," Naoto replied, "easy. Sorry about him. He's...easily excitable."

"Yeah," Junpei replied, "Ryoji's like that as well."

"In more ways than one," Yukari muttered.

"Ah, Yuka-tan," Ryoji said, "I'm surprised that you remember that part of me..."

"Sometimes I don't want to."

Chie cringed. "Great," she muttered. "Two Teddies in one room, I thought one of them was enough..."

Igor then chuckled. "Ah, the lost one and the Avatar of Nyx," he said. "I've been wondering when you two would show up. Anyways, in order to fix the Velvet Room and return to your respective times...but you all know that already, aren't you?"

"We HAVE been through this situation before," Yukiko replied. "Although...not with Labrys and the other Shadow..."

"Believe us," Ken said, a little surprised, "Ryoji can probably help us out...although..."

"Your concern is noted," Ryoji replied, "but when time slows down to a halt before your supposed time, it's a bit of a relief this time."

"Wait," Yukiko said, "supposed time? And Avatar of Nyx..."

"Yeah," Junpei said, "this guy's the source of the Dark Hour...and the only thing keeping Minato alive."

"You're kidding," Chie muttered. "That guy is Minato's lifeline?"

"It's a long and painful story," Minato said. "Heck, I'm just surprised that I get to meet new people this way...and Ryoji's excited for the same reason."

"I believe one said this outside my Branch," Igor replied. "'It doesn't matter wherever or whenever one can be, but friendship can last a lifetime.' To me, bonds are the one thing that is constant in these worlds, and seeing so many people from different worlds interact is a most intriguing aspect of these Time Loops."

"Huh," Kanji said. "I didn't think that you'd actually enjoy them."

Igor gave Kanji a grin. "The Velvet Room itself is placed within dreams and reality, mind and matter. Wherever this Branch gets fused with, my companions and I also appear. Although...it is odd that you have the one who shares memories with one of the residents here."

Labrys blinked...then realized something. "Wait, you mean...the ill girl is here?"

Yosuke cringed. "Great," he muttered. "And considering we're all Looping...including Proto-Teddie...wouldn't it be easy to create a Time Paradox?"

"Not really," Shinjiro replied. "I've managed to survive MY own Death...although what surprises me is the variant involved when I deal with Minato's 'sister.'"

"Wait a minute," Aigis said. "You mean YOU..."

"Yeah...I have the Multiple Persona thing as well..."

"That makes four," Yu muttered. "Or five, if you include Elizabeth." That last one made Minato glance at Yu in fear. "Yeah, I know...let's just say that one time, she found the power of the Wild Card just by facing me...I take it you've fought her?"

"Word of advice," Minato replied, "do NOT use the Omnipotent Orb. Seriously, I think their attacks can break several different scales at once."

Igor then gave out a chuckle. "Before you start comparing notes between Elizabeth and Margaret," he said to the two groups, "consider their jobs as assistants and remember that I am in charge of this room. Part of the job involves a certain...training regiment if they are to adapt to the needs of the Contract Holder."

That made everyone except Ryoji cringe. Knowing how freakishly strong the assistants were, if Igor was the one who trained them, then he would make Nyx, Erebus, Ameno-Sagiri, Izanami, AND Hi-no-Kagutsuchi look like they were dust in the wind.

"And considering the rules of the Velvet Room," Yu said, "I...think we lucked out that the places we live in aren't smoking craters."

"Truth be told, that much power would require bigger threat than those you've faced combined," Igor replied. "My weaker Personae would be enough to take them out, but like you said, I cannot directly interfere in your personal adventures."

"Yeah," Minato said, "I can see that."

"You know I've apologized left and right for that," Ryoji said to Minato.

"I know, and I've forgiven you every time."

Labrys blinked. "Am I missing something?" she asked Aigis.

"Minato sacrifices his life in order to stop Erebus and Nyx from meeting," she said to her "older" sister. "Considering the results...some of us are mixed."

"I'm not going to ask anyone else to do it, either," Minato said to the others.

Yukari cringed. "Yeah, we pretty much found out after the whole thing happened," she said. "And I apologized more times than enough."

"Back to the subject at hand," Igor replied, "I will provide assistance to you all concerning this issue...in my own way. But remember that solely battling can wear the soul, so for those who haven't joined in, you can enjoy the festival outside until you find out why time is slowing down and converging. Just remember that because of the Time Loops, you already know of events to come, so you won't be able to disrupt the flow as much as you would think."

"Wait, festival?" Labrys asked them.

"Yeah," Shinjiro replied. "Turns out the whole gap outside time and space is one giant culture festival in Yasogami High."

"Gap...outside?" Ryoji asked them, clueless. "I don't know what that is, but if it means the End of the World is delayed, count me in."

"Oh yeah," Minato said. "Ryoji's never been to a festival in this branch before."

"Now's a good as time as any," Kanji replied. "However, we might have to find the two we're going to meet up with here..."

"Thanks for the info, Igor," Yu said. "And we'll make sure to visit you guys from time to time."

Igor gave out a smile as the groups left...then went to his fortune telling as he picked up a card revealing The Tower in an upright position.

'*They've grown to be strong,*' he thought. '*But part of me wants to see if the ones before them would be involved. Would be interesting to see four different groups interact at once...*'

[Persona 4], [Gundam]
Kira Yamato's Design (title added by compiler) – parts 1 to 3
Author: Drakohahn

"Great, where am I?" Was the very first thing out of Kira Yamato's mouth as he looked around while waiting for his Loop Memories to kick in. It was rather hard to see, due to the omnipresent fog. He sent out a Ping, receiving several responses. The memories kicked in shortly thereafter.

He was Kira Hibiki, son of a prominent geneticist and quite the genius himself. At the age of 15, he was already in college and had a patented product out on the market. His Birdy robotic AI pets were becoming very popular. Kira grimaced at that memory as his Birdy represented his bond with his friend Athrun, so he wasn't so keen on sharing it. Oh well, might as well just get over it now.

After a moment, he continued his memory check; He had been interviewed plenty in the recent days as the Birdy's popularity grew. However, a few hours ago, he had received a mysterious phone call. It was somewhat frantic, saying that he was in danger and that he should meet them at a specific address and at a specific time. His unawake self would normally have ignored something like that, but something about the call tugged at him.

So, he went to meet this person at the time and place he gave. When there wasn't a person there, he waited a few minutes. As he waited, he paced around. There was a rather large TV in this place, and when he was in front of said TV he had felt something tackle him and he fell into the screen... And now he was here in this foggy place somehow. Strangely, there was something familiar, and very disquieting, about this place.

Kira bumped into something in the gloomy haze and then he realized where he was now.

"It can't be! Why here, of all places?!"

…

Yu Narukami looked at the Awake members of his team. They had all seen Kira's face on the Midnight Channel and felt the Ping mere minutes ago. They've had more than enough experience with visiting Loopers ending up in that place to recognize when a Ping came from there. The fog was going to lift soon, so there wasn't much time. So, they were mounting a rescue mission and hope that they weren't too late.

…

Yu Narukami, Yosuke Hanamura, Chie Satonaka, Yukiko Amagi, Kanji Tatsumi, Rise Kujikawa and Naoto Shirogane all stood outside the TV they use to enter the Midnight Channel. They all shared the thought of making it to the visiting Looper and hopefully getting him to accept his Shadow before he could deny it and make it attack. Getting that to happen didn't always work out.

By this point, they didn't really need to say another word. As one, they nodded agreement before pushing into the TV. The seven humans landed on top of a black and white bull's eye

with the outlines of people on it. Though the place was blanketed with heavy fog, they had special glasses that could see through it no problem. To their eyes, they saw an impressively sized TV studio with stage lights everywhere. And then...

"There you guys are! I was starting to get worried," declared a dumpy, blue bear in a red suit as he ran closer. "I sensed the arrival of the Looper awhile ago. It's rather far, so I figured I'd wait here to meet up with you, rather than try and go at it alone."

"It's fine," Yu stated. "Let's go."

...

"Is this... A hospital?" Chie spoke the question that was on everyone's mind. They found themselves in what looked like a ruined hospital lobby; benches either destroyed or torn from their spots, the long counter dirty with age and covered in ripped posters, and various papers littered the ground. However, it was the voices that started echoing through the empty halls that really made it disturbing.

"I want my child to have blue eyes and blonde hair!" One woman's voice declared.

"I want my child to possess all of my abilities!" A soft-spoken man's voice stated.

"Exceptional abilities are a gift to help improve the child's future," spoke an older male's voice as if in reply to the previous one.

"She had a miscarriage! How could you let that happen?!" An angry man's voice echoed. "We spent a fortune on the genetic enhancements!"

"Be especially careful of your nutrition and dietary intake during your pregnancy," advised a male doctor to what would obviously be a female patient. "Here's a schedule of how you should spend your days... I can't make any guarantees. Naturally, the mother's body will affect the course of embryonic development."

"Oh no! Its eyes are the wrong color!" Came the voice of one new mother. There were several more voices that spoke along those kind of lines. The Investigation Team all looked at each other during this time as understanding filled their eyes. This place dealt with genetic engineering?! Who was the visiting Looper that his space turned out like this?

...

"This place is seriously creeping me out," Yosuke stated as they worked deeper into the space, not that he could be blamed. Most people tended to have problems with hospitals at the best of times; make the place a rundown mess, add disembodied voices talking about how they wanted their children modified and how much they were paying to get these enhancements and the creep-o-meter jumped to the red zone near instantly.

"No kidding," Rise was looking especially nervous. During all the time she had her Persona's Supreme Insight, she had developed her own little sense of things. That sense was telling her that something very powerful was here. Yu had told everyone about the loop he had where

Naruto and Sakura had gained their Personas. This probably wasn't even close, but still very dangerous.

"The atmosphere's horrible, but it's eight loopers with maximized Personas vs one potential Shadow Self. How bad could it be?" Kanji boasted. They were just outside of the portal to the Looper's location, but everyone else immediately stopped so they could turn fully to face their friend who just invoked Murphy's Law. He chuckled nervously at the unspoken admonishment.

The Investigation team all got their game faces on as they turned back to swirling black and red opening. As one, they marched forward.

…

Unfortunately, they were a bit late. The confrontation between Human and Shadow was in progress. They both had brown hair and wore the same black jacket. However, while they were different in eye color, the original having violet while the Shadow was gold, they were completely opposite in attitude. Normal Kira seemed like he was readying himself for a fight, combat stance all ready with grit teeth, while his double merely stood with an arrogant smirk on his face.

"No, I'm just one person same as everyone else!" Regular Kira half-shouted.

"But you're not like everyone else. You are better, perfect even. You are the Ultimate Coordinator!" Shadow Kira countered without losing his grin.

"I'm not defined by my abilities alone! Everyone I care about knows that! I KNOW THAT!" The Investigation Team realized what was about to come out of his mouth, but weren't able to interrupt fast enough. "YOU ARE NOT ME!"

Those words echoed through the room. If anything, the arrogant smirk on Shadow Kira's face became absolutely psychotic!

"THAT'S RIGHT! I'm not you! I AM ME NOW!" Many Shadows shot out of nowhere to engulf the rejected Shadow Self.

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Devil Survivor 1], [The Emperor's New Groove]
Amala's New Groove
Author: Gamerex27

Slowly, the former ruling senate of the kingdom and current herd of llamas glanced at one another, not *quite* making eye contact.

The sole female of the group opened her mouth, as if to say something, then paused.
"I *suppose* we did wish for Variants and Fusions all this time. Perhaps we should have phrased our wishes more carefully."

"Still better than home," the mutant, horned llama told Isabeau, with the rest of the herd nodding in agreement.

"...so, who's up for getting revenge on the bitch who turned us into giant walking lamb chops?" Naoki continued.

"With no Pocket access or magic?" the llama wearing a white hat chimed in. "I dunno, I'm all for something to do other than sitting around eating grass, but we *might* be in over our heads here."

"We've all killed entire *pantheons* before: each and every single one of us," Naoki muttered. "Don't tell me you're gonna let something like no fingers stop you!"

"It's not that." The programmer sighed, then continued. "...I think this is part of the Disney universe. I'm pretty sure I saw this movie, and uh..."

"...'uh,' what?"

"...there's a lot of *weird* stuff later on," Atsuro explained. "*Really, really weird.*"

"...we have been through catastrophe after catastrophe, death after death, and the *EDIT*," Isabeau hissed, exasperated. "This *cannot* be any worse!"

...

"You know, back there, I think you spoke a bit too-"

"I. Know."

"Just making sure," Naoki said, dabbing at his makeup and reapplying his rouge. "Y'know, old me *might* have been too much of a pussy to cross-dress for a disguise. Guess everything we've been through drilled all the hesitation for everything out of us."

"...but *how* is it that *no one* in this restaurant recognizes a herd of llamas disguised as men and women at this table?" Flynn asked, poking a polished hoof from under his capote at the "no llamas allowed" sign at the front of the bar.

"Don't know, don't care," the Demi-Fiend replied. "Makes about as much sense as anything else here."

The llama with brown fur finally spoke up. "We're never going to mention this Loop ever again," Langdon said. "Agreed?"

"Agreed," said his fellow Amala Anchors in unison.

[Nocturne]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

"Heeeey. So you've been talking with the hemaprhodite, huh?"

Naoki backed away from the girl he loved used to love. Chiaki didn't seem to care, as she just stepped closer and closer in her newly created Baal Avatar body until she pinned him against the wall, wrapping her arm tentacle around his waist.

"So, what'd shi say? Is shi making a Reason?' the woman who established the Reason of Yosuga asked, in a pleasant sounding voice with *dangerous* undertones. "Did shi summon hir god yet? Did shi *stick it in?*"

Naoki flexed, forcing the tentacle off of him, and shoved Chiaki away. "No, no, and *no*. Now piss off."

"You're so angry," she said, practically purring. "I like that. I wouldn't have before, but...well, you need power in order to thrive. And anger is a *very* good generator."

"Who's talking?" Naoki growled. "Chiaki? Or Baal?"

"Both." She stepped closer to him again, looking the Demi-Fiend square in the eyes. "Now where is *shi*?"

"Slaanesh isn't making a Reason," Naoki muttered, trying to walk away, only for his former friend to place herself in his path yet again. "What do you care?"

"I saw what you did with her," Chiaki said. "How you looked at each other back in Ginza. How shi shied away from the fighting, and just sat in that *bar*? Love...is a weakness. And we can't have the one person who can fulfill the Reasons be *weak,* now can we? So, I'm going to *kill* hir, and prove to you that-"

Whatever she was about to say next was cut off as Naoki punched her through the wall on the other side of the room, sending her flying out of the building and clear across the ruins of Tokyo.

"No," he said to himself. "I've lost friends before. Lost *you*. And I won't let that happen *ever again*, even if just for one Loop.

"Fucking Yanderes," he said, scowling as he stepped over the corpses of dozens of dead Manikin men, women, and children that Chiaki had slaughtered, and left the building.

[Persona 4], [Gundam]
Kira Yamato's Design – part 3
Author: Drakohahn

As the Shadow Self grew bigger, Kira put a hand on his chest and collapsed into a kneeling position as he suddenly found it difficult to stay conscious. The Investigation Team summoned the cards that held their Personas and shattered them.

"Izanagi!" Yu shouted as his chosen Persona appeared above him; a mostly black humanoid figure with a strange naginata in one hand, bladed wedges on the bottom of his feet and what

look like long broken belts connected to his armored head.

"Takehaya Susano-o!" Yosuke roared as his Persona faded into view over his head; a crazy colored disco-suited man with several bladed rings surrounding him... and a literally flaming afro.

"Haraedo-no-Okami!" Chie commanded with her Persona emerging in the air; a black-clad female figure wearing golden armor on her head, arms and skirt with a green cape.

"Sumeo-Okami!" Yukiko beckoned, her Persona swooping down from the ceiling; a solid gold female humanoid with a ruby-studded shield in each hand and a long string of gold feathers connecting her arms.

"Takeji Zaiten!" Kanji bellowed as his Persona appeared before him; a massive white humanoid robot with flame decals, white cape and a flame shaped sword in its left hand.

"Kamui-Moshiri!" Teddy barked with his Persona materializing next to him; a conical robotic being with a grinning face over rainbow stripes on the pointed end of its chest, stubby limbs and its arms ended with golden bear paws with sharp blades, a long red cape with white stars floating free over an equally long rocket engine sticking out of the rotund machine's backside and a crown.

"Kouzeon!" Rise entoned, her Persona sliding a large visor over her eyes; a huge six armed woman in a white dress, a telescope in place of a head and a mini-solar system around her waist.

"Yamato Sumeragi!" Naoto yelled, the last Persona to appear; a noble dressed figure with long blonde hair flowing from a biker helmet shaped like a long, pointed beak, with metal wings connecting from its back to its hands and in its right hand was an odd cross between a katana and a rapier with a basket hilt opposite the blade.

<Cue I'll Face Myself Battle>

The result of the Shadow Self absorbing the lesser Shadows was a humanoid at least four meters tall by himself. He wore dark grey robotic armor over his arms, legs and chest and he had some kind of massive ring on his back with three large conical pods and several more blade-like protrusions. Blonde hair, a small white mask over his eyes and a smirk both arrogant and insane completed the image.

"I AM A SHADOW, THE TRUE SELF!" It cackled psychotically. "AS THE ULTIMATE COORDINATOR, HUMANITY SHALL BOW DOWN BEFORE ME!"

[Devil Survivor 1]
(no title)
Author: Gamer A

Night of the fifth day. Atsuro told the others that he would take the first watch, but he wasn't expecting anything to happen. As usual, they were taking advantage of the safe zone

maintained by the Shomunkai cult, so it was unlikely that any demons would come close to their sleeping area.

Instead, Atsuro was concentrating on fiddling with a spare Comp, taking it apart so see what made it tick. Sometimes, they needed mystical components to maintain the Harmonizer field that evened the odds in a battle between a squishy human and a nigh-invulnerable demon. But sometimes that was done purely by the software. The Harmonizer was useful, and would be even more so if he could run it off of something with more battery life than a handheld game console. The young-looking hacker chuckled to himself. Maybe it could even turn the tables on the Original Seven...

"Still not tired of computers, I see," Kazuya whispered from behind the Anchor, careful not to wake up Yuzu, Midori, or Keisuke.

"It'll take more than a few centuries to dampen that," Atsuro said.

"But it's been longer than that for you, hasn't it?"

"Well, yeah... Hard to keep track when we only have a few months at most at a time," Atsuro admitted. "Say, what do you think Belial will try this time?"

Kazuya looked down at this. "I don't know."

Atsuro tried to brighten the mood. "Don't worry, if all else fails, I can take him."

"Yup, that's why you're the anchor instead of me," Kazuya said. "And maybe we're not actually fragments of each other and he's not awake this time."

"Beldr but not Belial? Yeah, fat chance," Atsuro admitted.

While it Varied, the usual scenario was that all of the Bel demons were fragments of a single soul. It had been pretty obvious once Kazuya started Waking Up that the reason he wasn't the Anchor was that all the others would share that status, and there was too great a risk of Belberith - or whichever one had absorbed most of the others early this time - overpowering them and taking over the world - and making things miserable for mankind.

"He won't kill Haru. Deliberately, anyway," Kazuya assured his friend. Though they both knew that demons tended to forget that the keystones of their plans were easily done in by their own collateral damage.

"Get some sleep, Atsuro. It's my turn at watch, and you can fiddle with that in your Pocket when we have some peace."

Amala Activation and Miscellaneous part 7

[Admin Shenanigans]
Taira-no-Masakado
Author: Gamerex27

People believe that universes are all separate. All parallel worlds, all other sides, are segmented by barriers, which must be bypassed in order to travel through the multiverse. That they are totally and one hundred percent disconnected from one another.

In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Every universe that exists, past, present, or future, exists not in a vacuum, but tied together by a system of unimaginable power. As it is difficult to describe in the English language, the closest analogy those who run this system is to the legendary World Tree from Norse mythology: Yggdrasil. To further expand upon this, the "Yggdrasil" system can best be understood as the most complex and eldritch computer system ever built.

Upon each of its nigh-incalculable branches rests a multiverse. Some of these Branches split off into linked universes-twigs, if you will-which are closely connected to one another by recurring concepts and code across all worlds.

And more than a trillion trillion years ago, this system almost crashed.

No one knows why, as the memories of this Event in the very Admins that run Yggdrasil were corrupted by it. Precious few universes (including the universe you, the reader, comes from) were left untouched by this disaster. Every corner of reality, every inch of creation was ravaged by this nightmare. All of existence was left in jeopardy: if Yggdrasil broke apart, it would be impaled by its own Branches, and all worlds would die. No, not die: to have never existed at all.

To stop all of creation from tearing itself apart, the Admins enacted a last-minute solution to the problem. They put a number of worlds into a time Loop-that is to say, when a world reached a certain point in its history, it would reset back to an earlier point, and repeat ad nauseum. This countermeasure prevented the problem from worsening, but in order to keep the Loop stable, an Anchor from each world was programmed to keep their memories of every reset, to make sure the Loop would not crumble in on itself without an aware entity to support it.

Wanting to be merciful, the Admins also programmed the possibility for additional people to retain their memories through each Loop-these other Loopers were usually friends, family, or those with a close connection to the Anchor, Awakening in their Loops every now and again (not throughout each Loop) to help their friend retain his, her, its, or any other pronoun's sanity.

However, things are rarely that simple. As with any disaster, there is a point where it originated from: a Ground Zero.

There are several universes that were close to this Ground Zero. These Loops were badly damaged as a result of this, and suffer from myriad problems such as immense difficulty Activating Loopers properly, glitches in the timeline, and various metaphysical viruses invading the worlds and trying to tear both Branch and people alike apart.

One of these Branches is commonly referred to as the "Megaverse," due to its robotic Anchor being codenamed "Mega Man." This Branch is the most damaged running Loop in all of Yggdrasil, and its inhabitants suffered through nightmarish failed, unstable Loops and viral trauma for millions of years.

There is another multiverse that was close to Ground Zero, and is just as damaged as this first universe.

As you may have guessed, that Branch is known as the Sea of Amala. Or, as you may know it better, the multiverse as seen in the "Shin Megami Tensei" games.

Here is how these Loops began for the inhabitants of Amala.

...

"Tea. Hot."

Stone fingers drummed on a wooden, sturdy desk.

"Shrine for good luck. Set up."

"You don't *need* to ask us for help," the man standing in the corner of the cubicle grunted. "We're using all the luck we have for these 'Loops.' And besides...it is odd for one who has Ascended to godhood himself to be praying for help, no?"

Taira no Masakado sighed. Yes, he had been mortal once upon a time. He had fought to free Edo and the rest of Nippon from a nightmarish, corrupted government. He had liberated thousands of people, and died a good, honorable death.

But that was not the end of it. Upon dying, he found himself a room enclosed within fuzzy walls, with an annoyed woman with oddly even eyes glaring at him. Apparently, he had become so honored by the people of Edo-or as it was now called, Tokyo-that they had deified him as a guardian spirit of the city.

Belief begets power, as you are no doubt aware. This power catapulted Masakado's soul to the highest echalons of existence, to Adminhood.

But this was a dangerous prospect. At least, it was now. When Masakado Ascended, Yggdrasil was still in working order, and his deed caused no problems save a explosion of the monitor from which he emerged. With the Loops, however, many universes cannot handle someone with such power. If someone attempted to become an Admin through the use of enormous amounts of cosmic power, or just became too strong...

...they would tear their universe apart, leaving nothing left but their own self in the offices, to deal with the consequences of their mistake for all eternity.

Which is what he and his superior Izanagi-no-Okami were trying to *prevent* by getting these Loops set up properly.

"Why is it that you asked me to do this?" Masakado muttered. "I am a warrior. A king. And while I am by no means a fool, I died in 940, according to the 'Hub' Gregorian calandar. Even after thousands of years of learning, I still cannot program *worth shit*."

"Normally, you'd be right. You *are* a terrible programmer." Masakado sighed again: wasn't Izanagi visiting to *help* him?

"However," the patriarch of the Shinto pantheon continued, "you are the God of Edo. Tokyo. Whatever. As such, you know the city like no other. And these universes I have asked you to activate focus almost entirely on Tokyo. Everything that's important in these timelines occur there."

"...so *that*'s why you sent me this...program," Masakado said, clicking on an application. He moved the mouse around, flinging the camera around and around the scale model of Tokyo as seen in one universe. "One structured around a specific city. Yes...I *do* understand this," he continued.

"Good," his boss huffed. "Which one will you start with?"

"This one," Masakado said, minimizing the Tokyo app and opening the master file for a universe labeled "PERSONA."

"That one's not focused in Tokyo, though."

"But it runs on the same principles," Masakado countered. "This Tokyo programming...program...is still compatable with it. Also, I was preforming....diagnostics, that's the word...on this universe when whatever damaged Yggdrasil so badly hit. So it was somewhat protected from the blast."

"Very well, then. I'll come back when you're getting the next one online. You've picked an Anchor, right?"

"The only suitable candidate is the entity called Igor. As he is the only entity to have a role in each part of the timeline, he's the only one who can bear the weight of Anchorhood. Which...will be on...now."

[Nocturne], [SCP Foundation]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

INCIDENT REPORT:

At 04:44 hours, SCP-682 breached containment. Multiple teams were sent to secure 682. In addition to its own escape, it also allowed several other sapient SCPs to breach containment, including SCP-8888-A-666 ("Naoki/Kashima").

At 04:49 hours, SCP-8888-A-666 encountered SCP-682. The following exchange was recovered from security footage on-site.

SCP-8888-A-666: So, you're the immortal fucker all the coats are pissing themselves over, huh?

-SCP-682 ceases devouring the remains of an unidentified strike team member, and turns to face 8888-A-666.

SCP-8888-A-666: Meh, might as well see if I can take you on. What's an overgrown gekko to someone like me, huh?"

-SCP-682 continues to stand still, staring directly at SCP-8888-A-666.

SCP-8888-A-666:...so? You gonna try and eat me, or what? I've got plenty of Magnetite in me! I'm probably delicious!

SCP-682:....Ha.

SCP-8888-A-666:...what?

SCP-682 Ha. Ha ha. Hahaha.

SCP-8888-A-666: The fuck?!

SCP-682: Hahahahahahahahaha! Ahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!

SCP-8888-A-666: The fuck is so funny to you, jackass?!

SCP-682: AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH! HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

-At this point, Strike Team [REDACTED] closed in upon SCP-682, in an attempt to use the distraction to successfully restrain 682. However, 682 proceeded to grow multiple mouths from its sides and rear.

Agent [REDACTED]: JESUS CHRIST! SINCE WHEN COULD IT-

-SCP-682 proceeds to use several whiplike appendages (later determined to be tongues) to catch and devour the strike team as it attempted to re-contain it. At no point in this process did it cease laughing at 8888-A-666.

SCP-8888-A-666: Can it, jackass!

SCP-682: HA HAHAHAHAHAH HA HA HA! AHAHAHAHAHAHA!

SCP-8888-A-666: SHUT UP!

-SCP-8888-A-666 proceeds to attack SCP-682 for several hours, with its attacks tearing away at approximately 30% of 682's body mass. Other than moving away to avoid 8888-A-666's

strikes, it made no attempt to defend itself, and it never ceased laughing during the entire fight.

At 06:51 hours, SCP-682 was successfully re-contained, at the cost of ___ D-Class Personnell. SCP-8888-A-666 returned to containment after some coercion, though it expressed frusturation at SCP-682's unexpected behavior. SCP-8888-A-666 proceeded to request alcohol, which was granted after diluting it _ fold.

"....." -Dr Glass.

[Persona 3]
(no title)
Author: Zerorock41

"WEEELLLLCOME TOOOO THEEE VELVET ROOM!" an obnoxiously over-the-top voice cried out.

Igor, Anchor of the Persona Branch and usually Owner of the aforementioned Room, merely sighed. No one would be that hilariously cheesy when welcoming a guest unless they were wide-Awake.

Sitting in Igor's usual position, hands clasped in a manner familiar to the Evangelion Loopers, sat a young boy with dark blue hair, who was poorly trying to hide his mirth.

"Enjoying yourself in my position I see?" asked Igor, current guest of the Velvet Room.

"Oh yes. Very much so," responded a smiling Minato. "Just wait till you see my choice of attire for my assistants."

In a valiant though fruitless attempt to stave off the ensuing headache, Igor responded with the tried and true method of applying palm to forehead.

[Persona 4], [Digital Devil Saga]
Dojima's Awakening – part 1
Author: LostHereAndThere

It began with the dream.

He was alone, pacing through a white, sterile hall; occasionally he would tire enough to sit on one of the uncomfortable plastic chairs lining it. Precious few details were visible; there were no windows, and only a few doors. Worn leaflets cluttered a metal desk. A water station, recaf, and stale biscuits.

Then one of the doors opened, and a medical aide beckoned him to follow.

He was led to another hall, where the aide opened another door. It was a small room, flooded with warm, comfortable light. A woman lay on a bed, clutching a small white bundle to her chest. Her head was covered by some sort of hood or drape, yet she somehow knew who had

entered. The aide merely smiled and nodded, bidding him approach. The woman extended her free arm and weakly draped it across his shoulder. Instinctively, he returned the gesture, mindful of the woman's state. Gently, the woman presented her treasure to him. A small, rosy face peered from the white cloth, blinking at what he knew was the first light she'd ever seen. There was something between whimpering and giggles, and he knew that he'd given life to this one. He felt joy and fear tearing a pit in his stomach, and he could do nothing but lightly tighten the embrace in response.

Then the woman raised her hand, removed the drape, and *spoke*.

Her voice was white noise. Her eyes were the color of static. Her factions angrily twisted and warped, colors and shapes clashing and cycling without rhyme or reason.

That was when he woke up, both he and the demon screaming in terror and rage neither could comprehend.

…

Many, if not all, of the other Hunters had had dreams after their Atma came. Whenever he could, he took the time to talk to his tribesmen and ask about what they saw in them. Mostly, the visions coincided – a world of a blue sky, with people that made no war, yet fraught with danger. He knew this because even in the dream he was a hunter. He wasn't really sure what he hunted – part of him even dreaded the answer – but that was what he was.

There was a city of some sort – people dressed in colorful, strange clothes that badly contrasted with the Junkyard's ubiquitous slate-grey Karma Temple-issue body armor. There was certainly no famine and nothing like Atma – everyone looked too calm for that. The sky was blue, with a disk of white light completely unlike the piercing glare of the monitors or the bright glow of the LEDs.

The buildings were strange, nothing like the solid sandstone architecture that dominated the Junkyard – no pillboxes, no defensive emplacements – just irregular mishmashes of different materials. Surprisingly, some of the people he'd seen were well past fighting age and into senescence – how had they managed to survive? Also, there were little people – children (he didn't know where the word came, but he'd decided it was the correct one) living with their elders. In the dream, he himself lived with one. Pink. Very pink.

He'd consulted Vishuddha's database in order to understand the term "daddy" to no avail. Why would the pink child address him as such? Why did the demon recoil at her memory? And why did he see the leader of the Investigator Tribe in the dream, living alongside himself and the child? Disturbingly, he'd even seen faces he recognized in the Junkyard – a few Hunters, the gaunt, strange leader of the Preservers, Namatame, even his own second, Adachi. For some reason, the demon hissed and scowled at them with unusual vigor. As much as it hurt, he pressed the beast as tightly as he could – his own orders were to avoid infighting as much as possible; he didn't want to think what the effect on the Tribe's morale would be if he defied his own orders to devour his own second because he couldn't keep the demon leashed.

But it was the woman-that-was-not that truly frightened him. The memory came infrequently, but it hurt. He knew it was a woman – what little he could see under the drapes made that abundantly clear. But while the others he could see and understand, the woman was different. Her factions were jumbled, twisting and changing, never allowing him to commit them to memory. And it hurt to see her like that, and he didn't know why.

The demon slept and dreamed with him. Together they were one. But whenever it saw the thing, it started rattling and pulling at his mind in a berserk rage, the black mark in his shoulder burning with electric blue light. Even attempting to form the memory stoked the fires that always burned behind his eyes. The demon wanted the woman. She was the demon's. And his, by proxy; that was all he understood. He wanted the woman, hungered for her presence, and it hurt he didn't have her.

But there was too much to do. There was always far too much to do. Reinforcing Vishuddha's walls was slow work, and the Phantoms were encroaching in. There was always something he could do – helping here and there, showing up with extra rations and ammunition, assisting his men against the advancing Phantoms. Releasing the beast and showing the invaders by claw and flame what being a Hunter meant. Leading the occasional incursion into Ajna. Checking supply lines. There was always something to lose himself into. Something to keep him running.

Sometimes, when he had the time, he asked questions, and let himself wander in dreams. And he never stopped listening to the white noise, or staring at the nightmare.

Who knew, really... he might just start understanding her, one day...

•••

Yu Narukami Awoke to the feeling of cold raindrops in his ear. The first thing he noticed after that was the vile taste of old blood filling his mouth.

Mentally, he prayed to Masakado this wasn't the outcome of Teddie's ridiculous "make nice with the ex-wife" idea. Blearily blinking away the last traces of sleep, he managed to plant an elbow in the soft, wet earth. Definitely new Loop. If the silver – really silver, not merely grey – sunless sky didn't confirm another world, the complete lack of clouds despite the constant rain, the impossibly high tower in the horizon and the shining circuitry lines crisscrossing the stratosphere certainly did.

"Oi! Leader!"

"Hey! That isn't Serph!"

"Hands up where I can see 'em, buddy!"

Narukami managed to further push himself up and rise. The voices were rapidly approaching now. Three armed soldiers, weapons trained on him, were advancing to his position. While his attention briefly wandered to the handgun at his side, he started mentally listing how many ways he had to resolve the situation peaceably. He decided to play it safe and start with a Ping.

The effect was instantaneous. All three soldiers stopped in their tracks as the responses trickled back – three, four, five. Momentum broken, they lowered their guns and approached him slightly more cautiously. The point man broke formation, and cheerfully clapped Narukami's shoulder as he dragged/helped him towards his companions.

"Y'okay, bro? New to the Junkyard, ja? Loopy?"

The glee in that Jamaican patois was contagious. Narukami chuckled. He was sopping wet, wearing combat armor generously coated in mud, and his mouth tasted like he'd been chewing rusty nails. And yet a few words and a reassuring gesture were enough to make him smile.

"Yes to all three, thanks for asking. Give me a few moments for the memories to settle in, won't you?"

He closed his eyes, and blinked in confusion. There was… remarkably little in the memories. As in, there were, like, ten lines of background. If that.

He, Narukami (one name only), was the Leader of the Investigators, one of the six ruling Tribes of the Junkyard. The ultimate authority in the land was the Karma Temple – that huge Tower he'd seen in the distance. The entire purpose of this world was for one Tribe to annihilate the others and succeed in reaching the Temple's summit, whence they would ascend to Nirvana.

No personal memories. No likes. No dislikes. A few personnel files for close underlings. Some tactical data.

But then came the interesting bit. In a skirmish against a rival Tribe, the Investigator shock troopers had found an artifact – some sort of giant egg or bud, which both sides had mistaken for some machine of the other Tribe's. It had exploded, and some sort of strands of light had poured out of the relic. Almost everyone had been hit, and then… and then…

A sharp stab of pain from within forced him to kneel.

Millennia of control were sorely tested as Narukami felt power lines being redrawn in control of his body. Izanagi was screaming and clawing, pushing against his host's skull, against his skin. Narukami collapsed into the soft, grey soil, barely forcing breath down his starved lungs in throaty gasps. Bright white lines steadily spread across him from a black spot in his cheek, and the body underneath convulsed as new power flowed through it.

There was a commotion somewhere, far, far away. The happy voice was now full of concern, and there was another, a rough groan, pushing the young soldier away from the flailing Narukami. Even as he tried to make himself as small as possible, some force responded to his efforts by painfully pushing out. The Inaba Looper whimpered as bones broke, elongated and changed. Armor plates pierced his skin to cover him head to toe; light itself ceased to matter as his eyes were crushed out of existence and new senses awoke and old ones changed to compensate.

Long-known corridors of his mind were shifting into an alien configuration. Izanagi was struggling to rip his prison – the prison that was the flesh of Yu Narukami – open. His mind. What was happening? He was drowning in Izanagi, Izanagi was eating him, neither knew what to do. His conscience, his memories, everything that made him who he was, his very identity, was being pushed under Izanagi. The mask was becoming the skin, the beast was being given thought.

With a blood-curdling howl, Yu Narukami ceased to exist, and Izanagi gave his first clumsy steps into the physical world.

[Nocturne], [Warhammer 40000]
(no title)
Author: Evilhumour

Naoki Awoke on the damn roof when he saw something unusual but welcoming. Instead of the usual Conception appearing, he smirked as he saw and felt the familiar of taint of the Warp reaching out. Before the people next him could react, several daemon rained down and killed them with a splatter of blood going everywhere but *him*.

As he watched Tyoko being engulfed by the Eye of Terror, he felt a familiar presence next to him. Turning around, the Anchor saw his favourite Chaos God appear in one of their more favourable forms. Before he could speak, Slaanesh encircled around his body, emitting lust, pride, joy and a hostfull other emotions. With no words spoken, they watched the people of Tyoko briefly panic before adjusting to the relative peaceful new world they were in.

[Digital Devil Saga], [My Little Pony]
Atma Variant: Herbivore – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

Sweetie Belle's mind was in a haze. She remembered...being in the town hall? Why was she there?

She couldn't think. Couldn't concentrate. Her hunger was getting to her.

Eat it all eat it all eat it all eat it all

And that voice in her head wasn't helping.

And yet, as the herd of Atma-infected ponies neared the Everfree in their stampede, her mouth couldn't help but salivate at the thought of that tough-yet-juicy, delicious, flavour-packed bark. And the leaves...*the leaves!*

She had to eat it. She had to eat it *all*.

…

"I think that's all of them," Fluttershy said, grabbing the last fox kit from its hole and transfering it to the forest habitat she'd been growing in her Pocket. "I don't smell any more animals in here. Just remind me to take all them out at the end of the Loop. There *is* still that plot of land where I can put the forest, right?"

"Indeed, though getting it was quite the fight," Zecora responded, passing around stamina potions to the motley crew of ponies and pony/demon/AI hybrids. "Discovering that the deed was in Equaltown gave me quite the fright."

"Oh, *there*." Fluttershy's eyes narrowed. "Speaking of frights, you all came from the direction of that town, right?"

"We did," Seraph confirmed.

"And Starlight Glimmer was long gone by the time we got there this Loop," Fluttershy continued. "The Cutie Marks were all back on everypony there, too. Someone solved the problem for us."

"...you are suggesting that we killed her," Gale concluded.

"Um...not *killed*," Fluttershy said softly. "If you did, they probably would have been more upset and sad when we got there, even though the map misfired and didn't figure out it was already fixed. And I saw a white-coated pony that kind of looked like her being dragged to an asylum in the closest town to her village. It *was* you guys, right?"

"Yeah, it was," Argilla said, chugging her potion and wincing at the taste. "We just planned on doing some of the pranks you suggested when we met on Tatsumi Island, but things went downhill when her Removal spell just...didn't work."

"Really?"

"I've had some time to consider *why* that was the case," Gale thought out loud. "I believe that our 'Cutie Marks' and Atma Brands are one and the same in this world." He pointed to the stylized tornado with a set of jaws at its center on his flank. "As the Atma virus is incorperated into our very codes as a result of the Edit, it cannot be removed by such mundane means."

"Things went rapidly downhill from there," Argilla continued.

...

"That...that's not possible!" Starlight Glimmer whimpered, dropping the Staff of Sameness to the ground. "Why...why are your Cutie Marks *still there*?"

The Embryon twitched in place, as if holding something back.

"There are...some things...beyond control," Gale managed to get out, shuddering. "This is...Atma. A blessing and curse, tied to our very souls. The demonic self and our souls...are one and...the same."

"You can't...erase...who we are," Argilla panted, as she desperately tried to hold back the power surging through her. "It's...our karma. Too strong...to strip away."

"Ya bedder get back...mon," Cielo grunted. "Tings might get...ugly."

"No!" Her eyes twitching, Starlight Glimmer's horn shined, and trapped the Embryon behind a force field. "Even if you won't give up your talents," she snarled, "I can still keep you here forever!"

"No."

The increasingly incensed mare whipped her head to glare at the androgynous pony at the front of the group. "*What* did you say?" she hissed.

"Keeping ponies imprisoned like this only works for so long," shi said, as she staggered forwards. "The simple truth...is that equality is impossible."

"Quiet."

"Pegasi can fly, no matter how slowly," shi continued. "Unicorns can lift things, no matter how weakly. Earth ponies will always be a little bigger, and just a bit stronger. Mares and stallions will always have different bodies and ways of thinking."

"Quiet!"

"And even if you *did* strip all that away," shi said, taking one impossible step forwards out of the barrier, "what then? You'd...just be the same forever. No changing, no drive to make yourselves better. The only way to make things better...is to grow. You can't stay stagnant-"

"I SAID BE QUIET!" the madmare screamed, magic infusing her words, and freezing everyone in place.

"NO. WE. SHALL. NOT!"

The spell shattered to pieces, the leader of the Embryon's words overriding Starlight's presence. Slowly, Seraph kept coming forwards, stepping hoof over hoof. One step at a time.

"There's one simple thing you're forgetting, Starlight Glimmer," shi said, smiling even as the glowing light streamed forwards from hir Atma brand/Cutie Mark and encraoched around hir body. "Three simple words that make this universe go."

"Stop it!" she yelled, grabbing the staff from the ground and channeling her Cutie Mark Removal spell through it.

"Three words that bind us all together," shi continued, as the spell hit hir body and proceeded to do absolutely nothing. "Three words that, here, can bring you closer to that one truth about the world-"

"STOP IT!" she screamed, firing the staff again and again to no avail.

"yourself-"

"I SAID STOP IT!"

"And everyone else," shi finished, as shi came face to face with the dictator.

"We'll eat you!" Heat yelled, as his Fireball brand shined with power, and lines of light lit his body.

"No. Not those," Seraph said, as the lines covered hir entire body.

In a burst of light, Seraph vanished, to be replaced by...a monster.

Its grey, boney wings unfurled from its back, as it reared up on the *feet* of its red hindlegs. The mouths on its grey forehooves opened.

"Friendship is magic," the demon announced, as hir companions took on their own demonic forms in the background. "And we'll *use* our friendship to eat you!"

The room fell deathly silent.

"...beat you!" Seraph corrected hirself, but the damage was done.

"Screw it," Heat grumbled from both of his mouths, his heads shaking back and forth. "Can we just *eat* her? Titan meat or not, I want some fresh prey!"

"We *promised* the Anchor we wouldn't eat anypony!" Argilla rebutted, the mouths somewhere on her belly gnashing their teeth in annoyance. "And besides, you're a *fire* demon! Cook the Titans yourself! No need to kill innocent people if we have another way!"

"Perhaps we should save this for later," Gale interrupted, his sideways head-mouth opening and closing as they neared ever closer to Starlight Glimmer."We-"

Starlight began to hyperventillate. Sweat ran down her body, washing off the fake Equal Cutie Mark. But she was too pre-occupied to care about the gasps of the Equaltown ponies to care.

She...they were going to...she was going to-

...

As she reached for the ball of yarn on her shelf, Rarity's attempt to fetch the materials she needed to make a scarf was interrupted by the loudest scream she had ever heard in her long, long, long life.

"AAAAHHH!" she shrieked, falling off the latter and landing in an undignified heap on the floor. As she tried to get up, the yarn bounced off of her head, the impact further contributing to her newfound headache.

"Rarity!" From outside, Sweetie Belle came bursting in, her currently eye-having face staring at her. "Did you hear that?"

"Darling, I think *everypony on this hemisphere* heard that dreadful noise," she said, pushing herself to shaky hooves. "What on Equus *was* that?"

"You know the sound of ultimate suffering?" her sister asked.

Rarity nodded.

"That was something similar," she continued. "The sound of ultimate fear. People only make that noise when they're afraid beyond normal fear. The same level of emotion as how angry an average Dalek is, or how happy Pinkie Pie usually is."

"...oh, dear. Should we try and help whoever it is?"

"Eh. They'll be fine next Loop."

•••

Still screaming, the exposed Starlight Glimmer scrambled away from the advancing Embryon, every hair on her body turning stark white in utter terror. Pushing her way past the still stunned townsfolk, she bolted, running about as fast as an Unawake Rainbow Dash would call "a warm-up."

"...Worth it!" Cielo announced, as the townsfolk still stood slack-jawed.

"...As amusing as that was," Gale announced, his head-mouth doing a good job of keeping the tiny smirk that would normally be on his face away, "we should explain to these ponies what just happened. The lies, the fake magical staff, Glimmer's true plan, the reasons *why* equality for all is not always for the best, the..."

[Persona 4], [Digital Devil Saga]
Dojima's Awakening – part 3
Author: LostHereAndThere

"Aw, c'mon, buddy, you did great for your first time!"

Cielo was his name and he was one of his top men in the Junkyard. He had been the one to drag Narukami back to the Investigator base for treatment after his friend Heat, the guy with the grenade launcher, had chosen to err in the side of caution (more like he didn't want to deal with a new Asura) and had outright disabled Izanagi via something called an impact bomb.

Apparently, his Persona meshed too well with this world's Demon Virus – while he'd experienced many variations on Izanagi himself across the Loops, physically transforming into a demonic version of the god was new. The experience had been utterly bizarre for both Persona and host, neither used to the sheer alienness of a mental construct suddenly developing a crude mind with instincts and thoughts of its own, let alone being forced to develop walls and barriers to differentiate demon and human. Barriers that, by the way, were

being constantly tested and assaulted by a mind that, for all its bestial hunger, shared Narukami's own ferocious determination and will to survive.

Masakado be blessed for the blood pills and Titan meat. Otherwise Izanagi would never have shut up, screaming and begging for more to eat, consume, devour...

He blinked, trying to clear his thoughts. “Thanks, Cielo. I-we…I’m doing fine now, thanks.”

The cheerful soldier shook his head. “Nope. Yer not fine. None of ya both. Look, I… sorta gettit. Y’were used to this Naggy guy being a part of you, but not like this, ja? You tell him to jump, he asks how high! Actually, he doesn’t even ask, he just begs to come down! And now he can push back, and thinks and acts by himself, an' daaamn, how he must be screamin' in yah head he's hongry. We had the opposite problem when we went to Suou’s world. All loud an' noisy, an' suddenly, dey all became... puppets.”

“Izanagi’s always been a part of me, Cielo.” And somehow, it felt wrong to think of Izanagi as a puppet. And not only because of the Persona-turned-demon's quiet, smoldering fury.

Cielo shook his head as they left Muladhara’s main infirmary. “Look, let me explain. This Persona, it’s a mask, right? The one you show to the world and hides who you are. A social face. Banana nose told us how it works.”

Narukami nodded, arcing an eyebrow at Cielo’s chosen nickname for Igor.

The young soldier just laughed. “See, it’s complicated. Leader - Seraph, shi's been sorta trying to understand the virus and what it does to your head. See, at the beginning it’s all hunger and instincts, oh no, I’m starving, let’s eat the butler an’ the cat!” Narukami could barely repress a snort of laughter at Cielo’s exaggerated expressions.

“But after a while the part of you that’s the demon and the part that’s you start working together. The demon starts thinking with your mind, remembering with your memories, speaking with your voice. ‘S not a perfect merge, though. Ever. There’s always this… edge, savage, wild. But, both yous start linin’ up a bit better as they learn about the other. A bit like you accept a Shadow and turn it into a Persona, only a lot slower. An’ of course – there’s always the chance the demon can go berserk, like the Persona can go back to the Shadow if ya don’t learn to understand it properly an’ play good and nice with ‘im.”

“And the hunger? When does that go away?”

Cielo visibly deflated. “Sorry, buddy. I mean, we’ve had the demons for, I ‘onno, more Loops than I can count. And we still have to hunt and eat. We’re trying, but nothing works. ‘Side from… yanno…” Cielo averted his gaze in shame, rubbing his arm. “…eating…” the Inaba Looper winced “…there ain't a whole lotta options. Only Sera’s song or her blood, an’ only if we have either close. Still, dis is only a Fused Loop, mon, you should be clear after we clear things with God.”

Narukami froze. “We’re dealing with that *jackass?* Since when does that ever go right?”

“The Judeo-Abrahamic God is not present in this Loop, Narukami.”

The unemotional, stiff voice took Yu by surprise. He hadn't even noticed how Gale had managed to creep so close to him. "We're fully aware of the state of the Amalaverse God, though thankfully the God we interact with is closer to Brahman rather than the Western idea of divinity." The strategist frowned. "…YHVH has been known to appear in this Loop, but it's the exception rather than the rule."

Narukami sighed in relief. "Thank Masakado. So what happens now?"

"At dis point, Leader goes to Svadhisthana for answers and sorta conquers it. Y' feel like it, or ya wanna practice with Nagee-Man? We can handle it, no biggie."

Yu sighed. "Thanks for the offer. You're a cohesive unit, used to Seraph's command style. Honestly I'm afraid I'd only go to make a fool of myself in the battlefield and get you all killed without even being able to control Izanagi. Who could lead a team?"

Cielo snorted. "Heat was already thinking of ways to challenge ya. Honestly, he'll follow Seraph to the death, always does, but take 'ir out of the picture and he's first in line to scream he's the new boss." With a click of the tongue, he added: "Boy nevah had da head to be Leader. No one bettah t'be Leader's right hand, tho. Y' didna hear that from me, by the way."

Gale raised a hand. "Anyway, I need to ask some questions." He pulled out a folder and presented it to the visiting Looper. "Several Tribes have changed names and leaders: aside from us, the Solids have somehow become the Preservers, the Wolves the Hunters, and the Brutes the Phantoms. As for the new leaders, instead of Mick the Slug, there's a Namatame I don't recognize."

"He's from my Loop all right. Deludes himself into thinking he's saving people."

Gale nodded. "If his wish is to preserve his Tribe, it may be easier to press him into an alliance by convincing him it will ensure a maximum amount of survivors. There's no information so far on Varin Omega's replacement, but we do know the Hunters are now led by a Ryotaro…"

Narukami stared, and sank his face into his hands. "Crap."

[Nocturne]
SMT vs 4Kids – part 1
Author: Evilhumour

Naoki blinked as his loop memories kicked in and swore, "What the heck."

Or *tried* to swear.

He had heard of this variant before and while he had been somewhat hopeful for it, it was *still* a shock to the system. The Conception still occurred, but simply split Tokyo off from the rest of the world. Humanity had been driven into hiding from the *alien* invasion and he had been one of the few people that managed to bond with one of aliens in an heroic attempt to save everything.

He remembered *fighting* the invaders but not actually killing them because as soon as he won a fight, the aliens teleported away with *really* cheesy lines tossed at him.

He could hear Kashima grumbling at him at this insanity variant and he agreed; as soon as they could find some booze, they'd drink some of the memories of the 4Kids variant they were in away.

[Persona 4]
SMT vs 4Kids – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

"4Kids virus?" Naoto/Taylor asked, hat drooping over her forehead.

"4Kids virus," Yu/Sam confirmed.

"I mean, it *could be worse,*" Chie/Alex muttered half-heartedly. "But, *really*?! *Alex?!* And Tomoe's *The Lancer?!"*

"It could be worse, Sempai," Rise/Maggie pointed out. "You could be named-"

"*Tiiffany!*" Yukiko/Tiffany choked out, bursting into another one of her signature laughing fits.

"Could we at least beat Allen-*urgh, Adachi's* butt-no, butt, *I said butt!*-in?" Kanji/Jack asked. "Since murder ain't really happening this time, maybe we could ask Yamano or Saki what happened?"

"They're in comas," Yosuke/Max replied glumly. "And by the time Yu and I tried to bust him, he'd escaped into the TV world already. We can track him down like always...but it's gonna be *pretty annoying* if stuff like this happens throughout the entire Loop."

"...Jelly doughnuts?" Teddie asked the group, offering them a tray of rice balls from the food court.

"NOT HELPING!" half of them screamed back.

[Persona 3]
SMT vs. 4Kids – part 3
Author: wildrook

"Shadow Hour?" Minato/Michael asked Ryoji/Pharos/Paul, who was lucky enough to keep ONE of his names intact. "Really? They named the extra hour the Shadow Hour? I know we deal with a type of card, but this just makes it look like we save the world by playing a Children's Card game."

"I'm just as amazed as you are, Mike...er, Minato-san," Pharos replied. "But the weird part is it looks like they picked our names out from the BIBLE. Yet...it's a lot more faithful to the original material."

Minato/Michael groaned. "I don't even want to know how the others are going to react to their names this Loop," he replied. "Mari...er, Mitsuru would probably go Punish...er, Execution-happy...on someone because of this. Still, something is bugging me."

Pharos blinked as he looked at his friend's face.

"Is Nyx still the Arcana of Despair?" he asked him, before realizing what came out of his mouth.

Pharos blinked. "You just answered your own question," he replied. "The real question is...will you fall into a coma...or would you physically disappear from this world as soon as you seal me?"

[Digital Devil Saga], [My Little Pony]
Atma Variant: Herbivore – part 3
Author: Gamerex27

A few days before the outbreak of the Atma flu, Twilight had found herself burying the hatchet with Moondancer yet again.

Things went off the rails, however, when they got to the restaurant.

Oh, things weren't too different at first. The conversation went on as Baseline, the other patrons were in the places Twilight had already started to memorize...

Well, the waiter was a bit different: a tan-coated earth pony stallion with a lighter-colored mane, but this thing wasn't too worrying.

At least, until she had put her order in.

"What will you be having, Princess?"

"Um..."Twilight glanced back down at the menu. "The hayburger. Cooked medium, please."

"Alright," the waiter said. "Would you like to try our special wine? It's made...from..."

He trailed off, as he glanced to the corner of the room, where a white coated mare's slightly shaking hooves held up a menu.

"Uh...hello?" Spike asked.

"Hang on," he muttered. "I think I forgot to take her order. I will be right back."

He trotted over to the other table. The conversation resumed for all of a few lines, and then the chaos began.

"I'll be needing that menu now," the stallion said, gingerly plucking the menu out of the other pony's grasp with his mouth.

"Wait, *no!*"

She jumped slightly out of her seat. And as she fell back down, Starlight Glimmer briefly made eye contact with Twilight.

"*You*," the waiter hissed, his demeanor going from friendly to threatening in two seconds flat. "Guess it's time for *my* order to come in, too."

"Wait, *what?!*" Twilight said, scrambling out of her seat. 'Are you kidding me?! That mare in the corner is *her?!*"

"No!" the former dictator pleaded, knocking the table over as she scrambled to get away from the waiter.

The one with a lightning bolt Cutie Mark, with a set of fanged jaws emerging from its tip.

"Om mani padme hum," the stranger intoned. In a burst of blue light, he went from an ordinary pony to an eyeless creature made of brass and copper. Smiling a hungry smile, it raised its forehoof, now transformed into a massive bladed fist *much* bigger than his other legs, and pointed it at the villain, sparking with electricity as the smell of ozone filled the air.

"Let's finish this," he snarled.

And that's when Starlight Glimmer screamed like a little filly and broke right through the wall, running off into the night through a Looney Tunes-esque unicorn-shaped hole in the building.

As the waiter gave chase, Twilight muttered a brief excuse to her friends at the table, and pushed her way past the now-stampeding ponies in the bar to trail after the two.

•••

She galloped to a stop. The waiter, now back in his normal form, was watching the albino Starlight getting carted away in a straighjacket and magic-nullifying horn cover by the nice ponies in white at the outskirts of the town.

"Guess this works too," he muttered, pulling a chunk of meat out of thin air and taking a bite.

Wait, not thin air. A Pocket.

"Hi, Anchor here," Twilight muttered, as the other Looper turned around to face her.

"Roland," he said, holding out a hoof for an introduction. "Indra sometimes, though, when I use my Atma. Have you seen anyone like me? Other Loopers, similar Cutie Marks with jaws?"

"Yes," Twilight confirmed. "But that's not why I came after you. I wanted, well, to stop you from eating Starlight. I *know* you and your friends need to eat human flesh, and I know nothing can fix it...but I didn't want you hurting anypony. Especially any innocent bystanders while you were chasing after her."

"I was just going to scare her," he protested. "A prank. We just came from Erin's world, and I've got enough Titan Meat to last a few Loops."

"Glad to hear it," the Anchor said, smiling. "And I have to thank you for discovering Starlight for me."

"You didn't know she was there in Baseline?" Roland asked, his eyes widening in surprise.

"No. That expansion only came around a dozen Loops ago, and I was too pre-occupied working out how to fix things with Moondancer earlier in the timeline. Though this opens the door for a *lot* of pranks, now that I've nailed down where she;ll be after she escapes."

Twilight rubbed her hooves together and smilied evily. The Looper from Amala, who had devoured countless others and fought monsters that could break worlds apart by their mere wills, felt profoundly uncomfortable.

[Persona3], [Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

"You know," Yu Narukami said to the owner of the Velvet Room, "in all my times of Looping, I've never seen you outside the area."

"There's a very good reason for that," Igor replied, in Inaba's shopping district. "You've fought Elizabeth, Theodore, and Margaret at the same time, I'm assuming." Yu nodded as he noticed the vinyl record in question. "Unless it's very important, I usually take an...indirect approach in assisting you and your Persona. Besides, this is the only part of the Loop that sells the Aria of the Soul on Vinyl from time to time."

Yu sweat-dropped at that. Guess Igor has his eccentric side.

"Besides, I couldn't help but notice some...intent that was headed your way. So I figured...why not kill two birds with one stone, as the phrase may be?"

Unknown to Yu, a figure was approaching him with the intent to kill.

Igor, however, was the first to notice as he nonchalantly summoned a Persona. Specifically...Amun-Ra...which kneed the incoming figure in question.

"GYAAAH!!!" the voice yelled, revealing a man with white hair and a skin tone that was pale in question.

Yu was caught off-guard by the figure...but he had heard tales from Minato's group. "That's...Takaya Sakaki from STREGA," he said. "But isn't he supposed to be..."

"Dead," Igor replied. "And yes he is. But most Loops, he tends to slip through the cracks. Either way, it's his Persona that does the deed."

Yu cringed. "And now I'm having flashbacks to where I was infected with the Atma," he said. "Thanks for the save, but...who was the Pharaoh?"

"Amun-Ra," Igor replied. "One of the first few Ultimate Personae I've created in my personal Compendium."

"Remind us to never face you seriously," Yu said to the man with the long nose.

"All in good time, my friend. But right now, I must make my leave. Until then, I bid you adieu." He then disappeared from view as Ryotaro and Adachi arrived on the scene.

"What happened here?" the concerned uncle asked his nephew. "And who was that...old man?"

Yu was about to respond, but Adachi beat him to it. "Forget the old man," he said. "You might need to contact Detective Kurosawa."

Yu and Ryotaro were surprised...but the detective beat Yu to it. "I forgot that you were once stationed on Tatsumi Port Island," he said. "Adachi, you know about this guy?"

"How can I not? This guy's name is Takaya Sakaki, and he's the Leader of STREGA."

Ryotaro then cringed...as did Yu. "I'll see what I can do," he said. "Right now, I need to get you and the culprit down to the police station. Have one of your friends keep an eye on Nanako for me, alright?"

Guess that confirms that Dojima was Looping for him. But Adachi...stationed in Tatsumi Port Island? That alone, was news to him.

'*I had a feeling there was more to Adachi ever since Tartarus appeared in Inaba,*' Yu thought, '*and Igor taking out a rabid Persona in one strike confirmed why he's the master of the Velvet Room. If he was going all-out...would this place still be standing?*'

"Probably not," Izanagi replied. "Heck, I can't do that much damage when I jump to Izanagi-no-Okami."

Yu nodded. '*Still, if Dojima wants me at the station, I might as well see if the others can watch Nanako. The difference this time is that we'll both be back by dinner before she gets kidnapped.*'

"You're going to tell him about Igor?"

'*He's a recent Looper, remember? And Igor's the Anchor. He has to know sometime.*'

Izanagi, within Yu's mind, sighed. "I hope it works," he said. "Still, I wonder...would Igor win in a fight against this one guy named DIO?"

'*Igor held back against the Persona in Takaya's body. Even when Dio can Stop Time, I'm under the impression that Igor exists OUTSIDE Time.*'

…

Author: Tincanman125

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"All in good time, my friend. But right now, I must make my leave. Until then, I bid you adieu." He then disappeared from view as Ryotaro and Adachi arrived on the scene.

"What happened here?" the concerned uncle asked his nephew. "And who was that...old man?"

Yu was about to respond, but Adachi beat him to it. "Forget the old man," he said. "You might need to contact Detective Kurosawa."

Yu and Ryotaro were surprised...but the detective beat Yu to it. "I forgot that you were once stationed on Tatsumi Port Island," he said. "Adachi, you know about this guy?"

"How can I not? This guy's name is Takaya Sakaki, and he's the Leader of STREGA."

Ryotaro then cringed...as did Yu. "I'll see what I can do," he said. "Right now, I need to get you and the culprit down to the police station. Have one of your friends keep an eye on Nanako for me, alright?"

Guess that confirms that Dojima was Looping for him. But Adachi...stationed in Tatsumi Port Island? That alone, was news to him.

'*I had a feeling there was more to Adachi ever since Tartarus appeared in Inaba,*' Yu thought, '*and Igor taking out a rabid Persona in one strike confirmed why he's the master of the Velvet Room. If he was going all-out...would this place still be standing?*'

"Probably not," Izanagi replied. "Heck, I can't do that much damage when I jump to Izanagi-no-Okami."

Yu nodded. '*Still, if Dojima wants me at the station, I might as well see if the others can watch Nanako. The difference this time is that we'll both be back by dinner before she gets kidnapped.*'

"You're going to tell him about Igor?"

'*He's a recent Looper, remember? And Igor's the Anchor. He has to know sometime.*'

Izanagi, within Yu's mind, sighed. "I hope it works," he said. "Still, I wonder...would Igor win in a fight against this one guy named DIO?"

'*Igor held back against the Persona in Takaya's body. Even when Dio can Stop Time, I'm under the impression that Igor exists OUTSIDE Time.*'

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Tincanman125

"I've been doing some thinking lately." Izanagi said.

"I guess there really is a first time for everything." Yu quipped.

"Shut up and listen!" Izanagi snapped at him, "Basically I'm the result of Izanami giving you the power to use a Persona right?" He asked.

"Yeah, what are you getting at?" Yu responded.

"And that power was given shape by your mind right?" Izanagi asked.

"Still not sure where you're going with this, but yes." Narukami replied.

"Does that make you and Izanami my parents?" Izanagi mused.

"I think I need to go throw up now." Yu deadpanned.

"Hold on a sec," Izanagi interrupted, "since I'm living inside you, wouldn't that make you my mom?"

"....I'm going to go get drunk until I can't remember what you just said," Yu told him, "once I'm sober, we shall never speak of this again."

Izanagi responded by bursting out into laughter.

[Persona 3]
Loop Shenanigans – part 1
Author: Gamer A

The Nyx Annihilation Squad was paralyzed under the sheer pressure of the Moon's approach, Nyx's eldritch power rolling off of it.

Somehow, that wasn't what held their attention now, however.

"Uh, What the hell is that?" Junpei vocalized all of their confusion, as the colossal marine mammal balanced the moon on it's nose above them. Nyx's baleful "eye" looking just as confused.

"Did he-?" Yukari tried to begin, "Is that a persona, or did He transform?"

"I cannot tell from this distance," Mitsuru stated, trying to regain some control over the situation. "Yamagishi?"

"Uh, I have nothing," Fuuka Yamagishi responded.

"I can confirm that Makoto has become the Great Seal," the Awakened gynoid Aigis said. "But it is also the case... that the world has gone insane."

…

Igor stared at his Velvet Room's current guest. "I admit I did say that nothing was beyond the Universe Arcana's powers. However... Is this going to be a habit for you?"

"I think we all need a change of pace." the blue-haired boy shrugged.

…

Loop Shenanigans – part 2

"Thanatos!" Minato called out.

"WHAT?" The death-god Persona replied in a booming voice as he crushed a still animate severed arm of the magician full moon shadow.

"Eat a snickers." Minato said as he tossed the Persona a candy bar.

"WHY?" Thanatos asked.

"You get grouchy when you're hungry." Minato explained as Thanatos devoured the candy bar, "Better?"

"Better." Stated the Persona, who had reverted back to Orpheus.

"I.. W-what... how the?" An UnAwake Yukari stammered, right before passing out.

...

"Nice acting." Minato said.

"It's a gift." Pharos told him.

"Think the rest of them bought it?" Minato asked.

"Totally, I'll bet they're tripping over themselves right now in the command room trying to figure out what's going on." Pharos chuckled.

[Nocturne], [Predator]
Demi-Predator: Origins
Author: Gamerex27

His hands in his pockets, Naoki casually strolled out of the bar, leaning slightly to the side to dodge another angry gunshot from what's-her-name from That One Loop called Remaining or whatever.

Of course, he also noticed the shadow creeping up on him from behind-leaping from treetops, staying in the shadows of the foilage, and trying to stay out of sight. Really, he would have been perfectly hidden, if Naoki couldn't smell the Magatsuhi flowing through his blood (and stained on whatever he was wearing).

"I know you're there," Naoki said, glancing to the trees and fiddling with his cell phone in his Pocket. He *really* needed to get one of those new iPhones one of these days. "You got something to say, say it to my face."

He was met with chittering, similar to the kind one would hear from a rodent.

Suddenly, a blast of force struck him square in the chest.

Naturally, it had no effect whatsoever, as the Masakados's powers caused it to dissapate harmlessly against his naked torso.

More chittering. A sharpened disc of metal flew out from the forest. The blunt, flat side of the projectile struck Naoki in the face. It was mildly irritating.

Several more discs followed, all having the same (lack of) effect.

"Okay, my turn," Naoki said, smirking devilishly. He lunged into the foliage, towards the direction of the attacks.

A shimmering, invisible figure stepped out of the way, leading to the Demi-Fiend totally missing him and landing painfully on his belly on the ground.

"Dick," muttered Naoki.

Leaping to attack, his foe released the claws hidden in his arms, and struck Naoki through the spine, paralyzing him from the legs down.

Or, rather, he *tried* to strike him in his spine, only for his claws to simply slide down Naoki's body. Blinking, the entity slid the claws down futher, and with more force, to no effect, eventually coming to rest on the boy's backside.

Both of them were silent for a moment. The Predator drew back his arm and stabbed again, to the same effect.

"Dude," the Anchor said, "dinner and a movie first. Look, I'm seeing Slaanesh later tonight, and if you wanna join in, you'll have to be tonight's sub-"

He was cut short as the Predator struck him in the back of the head. While, again, it didn't wound him, the impact *did* cut him off mid-sentence as his mouth filled with dirt and Lucifer-knows what else.

"Ew," he muttered, flipping over and spitting the gunk out at his enemy's face. "Right, my turn."

...

A swarm of lasers blasted the Predator backwards. It slammed against the tree, and a sickening crunch was heard as some bone in its body broke.

Smiling, Naoki lowered his foot from the culmination of his Xeros Beat and strolled over to the tree, whistling.

The Predator dipped its head. All it wanted was information. It wasn't even trying to *kill* this prey. But it had won nevertheless.

He would simply be back in the next reset, after all. The prey had won fair and square. His right to take his reward. His life.

But as the boy leaned down to gloat, he stumbled. He blinked, his eyes turning from grey to red in a flash.

"Calm," he said, in a completely different tone from his light-hearted jests during their fight. It didn't seem as if he was even *speaking* to him. "I wish to speak to it. Face to face."

The boy grabbed the Predator by the neck, lifting it into the air.

"A fellow hunter," he said, smirking. "But one unbeknownst to its prey. What are you? It matters not. Though it is odd that you struck only to stun, not to kill. You seek information. You...are Looping."

Dropping him to the floor, he knelt to the alien's eye level.

"Can you comprehend me?" he asked.

The Predator slowly nodded.

"Have you been cycling through your life endlessly, caught amidst an infinite Loop you cannot break?"

The Predator simply stared at him.

Kashima sighed. "Have you been repeating your life over and over?"

A nod.

"You hunt sapient beings?"

Nod.

A Looper. And one who hunted sapient beings, taking them as trophies for the sake of sport. Only one more question.

"Do you still wish to?"

The predator just stared at him. Slowly, it reached its working arm to his helmet, taking it off. Blinking in disbelief, it pointed to its ear, gesturing for Kashima to repeat himself.

"Do you wish to hunt us?" he asked, still smirking. "To strike down those who can challenge the gods themselves? To hunt those who cannot be hunted? To be the very best, like no one ever was?'

At that last statement, he frowned. "Stop that," he said, not to the Predator. "You *know* this is an event of import.

"Very well, then," Kashima continued, facing the alien again. "First, I shall answer your questions. Then, I will judge for myself if you can walk the road of the hunter. To see if you can hunt Loopers."

Miscellaneous part 8

[Digital Devil Saga], [My Little Pony]
Atma Variant: Herbivore – part 4
Author: Gamerex27

"-and I saw her when I went to that village to restock on carrots," Fluttershy finished. "It's good to know everything worked out for now. Still..." she said, trailng off.

"It is disturbing to know that Gilmmer, in Baseline, hunts Twilight down," Zecora said, pouring a potion of amplification on the speakers. "I suspect that the Expansions will lead to some final showdown."

"...Izzat a rhyme?" Cielo asked."Cause 'dat sounds like a bit of a lazy rhyme to me."

"It's not that hard-like rhyming with orange!" Zecora said, before her mouth caught up with her brain, and she flinched. "Er...you just need to remember that Foppies are pink, and Fobbies are Borange!"

"...yeesh, ya prob'ly have to reach a lot, ja?"

"We should save this for later," Gale announced, as a dull hum began to sound in the distance. "The group of infected ponies-"

"Herd," Fluttershy corrected.

"...*herd* of infected ponies is coming this way. If Seraph's song fails,we may risk being trampled."

"I can only do so many Tetrakarns at a time," Argilla agreed. "Are you ready?"

"I think so." Seraph stepped up to the microphone, grabbing it with hir horn's magic.

Liiiight-

Shi winced as microphone feedback drowned out hir voice.

"They're almost here," Heat growled, shifting into Agni by reflex. "Now or never!"

"TREES!" bellowed Mayor Mare. "HUNGRY! NEED EAT! EAT IT ALL! EAT IT ALL!"

"EAT IT ALL!" the herd behind her echoed.

Liiiight shines, on the heavens

As the thundering of countless hooves, paws, feet, and other appendages came ever closer, Fluttershy could spy a great deal of the Atma-infected ponies stumbling in their steps.

The earth the spirit, light brings glory and grace

May it open your eyes to the truth, Shan-Ti

The mad chanting of the herd turned to the confused whimpers of animals, and then to yelps of surprise and pain as most of them flashed blue and returned to their normal forms.

Shan-Ti

The crowd of monsters was now a crowd of ponies, dazed and falling all over each other into a tangle of hooves, heads, and tails. Only Mayor Mare stumbled forwards, even as her carapace turned back to fur and the writhing mass of tentacles on her face melted to become her eyes.

Divine light, our heart cries out to you

As shi sung, Seraph hopped off of the podium, and grabbed the Mayor as she fell.

Deliver us from the dark and give us hope

Veins of light covered the Mayor's body, and she returned to her pony form.

May you feel as with your undying love

Shan-Ti

Shan-Ti

As the last notes of the song rang, Ivory Scroll fell fast asleep in the Enlightened One's hooves, snoring softly.

"...that's it?" Fluttershy asked, cocking her head to the side in confusion as Seraph eased Ivory Scroll to the ground. "Usually singing starts a Heartsong. At least, in Ponyville."

"You are referring to the phenomenon where all affected break out into a choreographed song and dance routine, regardless of their ability to sing or having practice before hand," Gale said. "Perhaps we are immune to it due to our nature as-"

"Geez, mon! I thought you *stopped* bein' all serious and Spock-y in Baseline!" Cielo butted in.

Gale blinked. "There is a difference between being emotionless and being subdued, Cielo. Though I admit that I occasionally engage in sesquipedalian loquaciousness when I speak, this does not make me as souless as you suggest."

Cielo still looked at him suspiciously. "You're *still doin' it*. You're messin' with me, aren't you?"

"...Affirmative."

The group was cut off as Sweetie Belle stumbled into view.

"...still hungry," she moaned, as she slumped forwards. Trudging over to one of the tress on the outskirts of the forest, her teeth turned as sharp as razors, and bit a low-hanging branch clean off the trunk.

"...this won't be permament, will it?" Zecora asked. "Because Rarity (or anypony else) wouldn't like that one bit."

"Thankfully, the Admins made a patch for that," Argilla said, patting the worried zebra on the back. "It should be gone by the end of the Loop, so she won't have to go through this again."

"After all this time, you *still* think Atma's a bad thing," Heat snarked, pushing his way past Zecora to stare Argilla in the eyes. "Live a little, for God's sake! Eat someone: they'll be back next Loop anyways!"

"Heat...please drop that."

Rolling his eyes, he turned to face his leader. "C'mon. It's not like we can get this *cured*, even if we wanted to. We got used to this way back in Baseline, so why the hell can't *she* suck it up already?!"

"You're already on a short enough leash after you replaced the Indominus Rex some hundred Loops ago," shi said, a note of sternness slipping into hir voice. "We had to eat to get stronger; to *survive* our Baseline. And now that we're Looping, we're all strong enough to afford eating when we *need* to, not when we *want* to. It's her choice."

"Fine. As long as you give me mine." Heat turned his back on Seraph, took a few steps, and promptly tripped over the Mayor's body and landed face first on the dirt.

Several minutes later, Seraph, Fluttershy, and the rest led the confused and hungry herd of ponies back to town with a few trees in tow, dragging a still furious (and now stunned, to stop him from eating Ivory Scroll) Heat with them.

[Persona 3], [My Little Pony]
Great Seal – part 1
Author: Gamerex27

Rarity rubbed at her horn with her hoof. "Right...Mitsuru, dear, please explain to us what happened with Starlight Glimmer."

"We didn't do a damn thing!" Akihiko said, pumping his forehoof. "The moron did *herself* in with her spell!"

“My pony name is *Great Seal,”* Minato said, sighing as he slipped his headphones back on, struggling for a bit to get them onto a comfortable position on his now non-human head. “Names here tie back into your talent, right? What’d she expect, when she took away my ‘talent?’ Guess she was too dumb to realize that she’d *break the seal.”*

"In all fairness," Aigis said, rubbing at her flank (and, for the first time, regretting how human/equine she had become over the Loops: enough that the Cutie Mark removal spell worked on her), "she had no idea of what removing your Cutie Mark entailed. Death-or, at least, the personification of such-being trapped inside a mortal being is an outside-context-problem for the ponies of this world."

"Look, girls-and guys-" Starlight Glimmer said, in a decidedly more masculine tone of voice, "we can talk this out! Maybe go out for some drinks? Catch a movie? Go to some hot springs and take off our-no, *stupid Ryoji,* girls don't like that!"

The furious townsfolk didn't seem to care that this hypocrite who had been keeping them imprisoned for so long had done a total 180 in personality (and gender identity, and apparently normal identity), and marched towards her/him with their pitchforks nevertheless.

"She's possessed," Twilight sighed. "That much is obvious. But...how? And by who?"

"Aigis, if you would," Mitsuru asked, looking at the mechanical pony.

"Very well, then." Aigis removed a screen projector from her Pocket, hooked it up to herself, and started playing a slideshow.

"When Minato-san was a young boy," she explained, "he was unfortunate enough to travel to Tatsumi Port Island. Tragically, the personification of destruction and death, who had been summoned to the island through a series of fairly convoluted events, had broken free of its bonds in an evil cultist-slash-scientists' laboratory, and rampaged across the city, killing his parents. I managed to defeat it, but only by sealing away one thirteenth of its incomplete form within Minato-san."

"That's why Ryoji's here," Minato explained, walking up to the Cutie Mark Vault and breaking it open. "Since he was locked inside of me for most of our Baseline, he sometimes ends up Looping along with me."

"I take it by the lack of panicking that he has mellowed out after all these Loop?" Rarity asked.

"He was *always* pretty mellow to begin with," Akihiko admitted, as the Equal Cutie Marks were knocked off all their flanks and replaced by their normal ones. "He was only gonna end the world 'cause he had no *choice.* And because the Chairman of our school who tricked us into killing off the other parts of Death was *an asshole."*

"Okay, and your Cutie Mark symbolizes how good you were at sealing away Death both within yourself and protecting people from it with the 'Great Seal' thing," Twilight concluded, noting Minato's Cutie Mark was, appropriately enough, a shield marked with an overlaying skull and rosary. "And when she stole your Cutie Mark, she let Death out as your friend Ryoji to rampage. I get that. But why is he *inside her now?"*

"I do not know," Aigis admitted, as Starlight/Ryoji desperately projected a magical shield and battered his/her way through the angry townsfolk. "A reasonable explanation was that, since

Starlight was drawing some of the magic into herself by the nature of her spell, Ryoji was forced into her body as a side effect of Minato-san's Mark being stolen.

"H...hi" Starlight/Ryoji panted, galloping over to the other Loopers, breathing heavily as the townsfolk gave chase to them. "Maybe...we can finish the recap later? If they get to me, they might kill this body, and I *never* like ending the world...or Loop."

“You could’ve avoided that if you *waited* to wash the paint on your butt off,” Akihiko muttered. “You didn’t see her memories at all?”

“I never *meant* to get stuck in her body!” Starlight/Ryoji objected. “I didn’t want to pry! And we really should pick this up when we get out of here!”

Nodding, Twilight teleported them all away in a flash of light, reappearing in the map room of her castle.

"That...was different," Mitsuru sighed, flopping down onto her haunches. "I doubt that removing our talents would have stopped us from using our Personas against her, but it's always possible if that spell functioned like a Magic Bind or Silence spell."

"I...you should probably go back to them," Starlight/Ryoji told Twilight. "They may end up hurting themselves or others trying to find her...me..."

"You usually don't see a spirit of death being so...compassionate." Twilight remarked, smiling.

"A little bit of him rubbed off on me," Starlight/Ryoji said, smiling in turn as he/she pointed to Minato, "and-"

Suddenly, Starlight/Ryoji's eyes widened, almost popped out of his/her head, and he/she grabbed Twilight by her mane. "KILL MEEEEEEE!" the composite being screeched in Starlight's normal voice.

Then, just as suddenly as it happened, his/her expression returned to normal, and he/she released the other(?) mare.

"Er...sorry. That's never happened before," the composite being spoke in Ryoji's voice, scratching the back of his/her head with a forehoof. "I'm not *trying* to traumatize her, but being connected to the Appriser of Nyx (um, not *your* Nyx) isn't wearing well on her mind."

“Is it that,” Minato asked, “or is it seeing your fantasies?”

“Uh…” Starlight/Ryoji thought, blushing a little. “Maybe more of the latter. I should probably take a cold shower so she can stop screaming about the-”

“Don’t want to hear it!” Twilight interrupted, ignoring as Mitsuru muttered about perverts and “Executions” in the background. “It’d probably be better if we can just separate you two: it’d make all this a heck of a lot easier. Rarity, any thoughts?

"I may have a ponikin lying around in my Pocket," Rarity mentioned, as Twilight regained her composure, and straightened her mane. "You may be able to enter into there so we can deal with Glimmer properly."

"That would be good," Minato said. "But, you *might* need to end up sticking her in a mental ward instead."

"Amala," Twilight said with a sigh, grabbing a bottle of absinthe and passing it around.

"We don't have to deal with all of the *really* bad stuff from the other Linked places that badly," Akihiko admitted as he took a swig from the bottle, "...but I appreciate the booze. Gives me some carbs to burn for my next workout. Any more monsters to beat up?

[Persona 4], [Fantasy Life]
The Angler God
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Although most people tend to change Lifes on the fly, Yu Narukami had deigned to stay as a Cook this loop. After saving Reveria, he and Yuelia were travelling through the Elderwood looking for a few ingredients he needed for a Dish he had in mind.

“So do people really poke that dragon sleeping in the plains?”

“Yeah. It seems to have become some kind of game lately, ‘Let’s poke it as much as possible before it gets really mad!’ The poor thing just wants to sleep, so let it!”

Yu couldn’t help but laugh at that as his persona Izanagi asked him, ‘It couldn’t be that much of a challenge for loopers, can it?’

…

“OH SHIT OH SHIT OH SHIT-”

“DAMMIT KANJI! WHY DID YOU TAKE UP THAT STUPID DARE!?”

“BECAUSE A MAN SHOULDN’T BACK DOWN FROM ANY CHALLENGE!!!”

“THAT’S IT! NO MORE FAIRY TAIL LOOPS FOR YOU, THEY ARE A BAD INFLUENCE!!!

ROOOooOOOaaaAAARRRR

…

‘I am missing shenanigans, I know it.’ ‘Not now. Hm?’

Yu had noticed a large shape racing under the surface of the river as it sped by.

“What’s that?”

“Oh! That’s one of the Lordfish.”

That got Yu’s attention. Asking her about them, she went on, “They’re these really huge fish that live in the waters around Reveria, kind of like the big bosses of the fish. There’s quite a few of them around, we even found one that swims in LAVA it just so awesome!”

As Yu was getting tempted to go after them, the Forest Lordfish made itself known when it jumped out of the water. The massive catfish was covered in years worth of moss, cloaking it like a majestic cape fit for the king of the forest.

Yu instantly had flashbacks of the River and Sea Guardians from back home, and then he knew what he had to do. “Challenge accepted.”

…

It had taken a long time, many hours of dedication, and many broken fishing rods. He had began as a Novice, but quickly rose through the ranks of the Angler Life, soon surpassing his Master- soon surpassing human limit. His dedication to his Life had grant him the rank of God Angler, bestowed upon him by Yuelia’s father Divinus.

He chased after all the Lordfish of Reveria, catching them one by one until only the strongest was left. His house was covered in prints of the Lordfish he caught, as testament of the prowess he had.

He tracked down the last one in the Deepsea Cave, a cold and dank place off the coast of Port Puerto, and was about to begin the final battle. Kanji and Yosuke stood by with nets, ready to catch it when Yu gave the signal. Yuelia was holding a large bag filled with many SP-potions and other stamina replenishing drinks.

“Wow, Senpai looks really psyched for this!”

“More like obsessed. He did the same thing when we were in the Zelda loops.”

Yuelia shushed them. Turning to Yu, she said, “Remember, once you start this, you can’t stop or else it will escape. We don’t know when it will ever show up again, so fish like this is your only chance, got it. I’ll help you out with stamina recovery,so focus on your task, okay?”

With a nod, Yu walked to the edge of the water and casted his line, ready to catch the Poseidon Swordfish.

…

Even though he did manage to catch it an hour later, he never did remember that recipe we wanted to make.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod (title placed by compiler) – part 1
Author: Tincanman125

"So you're a girl again huh Minato?" Narukami asked.

"Yeah, I think the Edit knocked something loose in my code," Minato replied, "still, at least it doesn't happen to me as often as it does to Shepard."

"Mind telling me where we're headed?" Narukami asked, "My unAwake self wasn't paying attention to the briefing."

"Some near Earth-like planet, second rock from the local star," Minato told him, "I think it was called 'Daichi' or something."

"Ten to one says this mission sends us on some galaxy spanning adventure." Narukami said.

"That's a sucker's bet." Minato said with a grin.

=== Some time later===

"Ok, I've found what looks like an escape pod and some kind of..." Narukami struggled to find the right words, "prism shaped thing, which conveniently fits this empty slot on my armor."

"We'll deal with the obvious Macguffin later," Minato said over the radio, "what can you tell me about the pod?"

"Well there's some old guy in it, and he looks alive," Narukami reported, "we'd probably need some heavy lifting equi-" Narukami lost his train of thought as he noticed what looked like a purple tornado headed for him.

"Something wrong?" Minato asked, only to receive static as a response.

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Demon Negotiation
Author: Gamerex27

The two ponies-for a given definition of the term-glanced around the room awkwardly, not meeting each others gazes.

"Um..." Fluttershy said, creeping up to the bolted door. "Can you let us out now?"

The small hatch in the door opened, and a pale, bleached skull peered through.

"Neigh," it said. "For those who have conquered Death time and time again, it is *foalish* to remain afraid of mere bonds. Neither of you shall leave this room 'till you make amends."

"Uh...what he said," another skeleton agreed, which could *just* be seen polishing its bike in the background. "Stop being wimps."

"We already-"

The slit slammed shut, cutting off the Demi-Fiend's protests. Slowly, he sighed, then turned around to face Fluttershy.

"I....so..." he tried to say. "*Fuck me*, I suck at talking. No clue what to say."

"Er...well...let's start with the basics," Fluttershy suggested. "Who...are those demons outside? Are they from-"

"Amala, yeah," Naoki confirmed, trying very hard not to look down at his currently equine body. "And before you ask, no, they *aren't* from my Branch, because *no one else from my Branch can get Activated now*. At least, they're not native to any parts of Amala we know."

"Um...what does that mean?"

"All we know is that they're always Loop Aware entities that pop up in any Loop at random, or that the part of Amala they came from is *gone* from the Event that started this whole mess. Or, their branch is still around, but it's so corrupted Masakado hasn't managed to sort out the files for backups *or* render anything about it besides keeping it Read Only. *Or*, they were from *Amala* as a whole, and when the Loops forced the Admins to split the fragmented universe into different Branches, they *never had* a home Loop since they were *from the multiverse...* so they just got shunted from place to place." Naoki tried to shrug, then noticed his current lack of shoulders, and scowled. "That last one's the most likely, I think...but I really am not sure how many of them are Looping or not."

"Oh."

The two of them were silent for a good thirty-ish seconds.

"You know," Fluttershy said timidly, "I could teach you how to shapeshift back to your human form. I-"

"No."

Fluttershy blinked in surprise. "But I thought you were still *really uncomfortable* seeing us as ponies. Or *being* a pony."

"This...yeah, it's *jarring*...but it's something I need to *get over*," Naoki explained. "I said I was going to put everything in the past, and to do that, I need to start with this. A body's just a bunch of meat, Magnetite, Magatsuhi, and a soul pinning it all together, anyways.
It *shouldn't* really matter what it's shaped like."

He paused for a second, seemingly spacing out.

"Wait. The brainwashing thing *wasn't* inherent in the serum?!" he exclaimed. "*Why didn't you tell me that?!*"

Another pause.

"*'I never asked,' my ass!*" he yelled, again to thin air. "Okay, okay, she *had* to die, I get that, I *agree* with that, but-wait, *razed the planet to the ground?!*"

"Um...who are you talking to?" Fluttershy asked.

But Naoki didn't seem to notice. He just kept ranting and raving at a voice only he could hear.

"You just said you *destroyed her kingdom!*" Naoki roared. "Killed the tyrant?! What about the *thousands of brainwashed humans*, and, hell, those *non-brainwashed, weak-as-hell* ***ponies?!***"

Another pause.

"Don't give me, *"I was willing to do the same in Baseline!*" In case you forgot, the world was *dead already!* And Lucifer never gave me the full story! That manipulatuve *bastard* never said we'd break all of reality by trying to-"

He trailed off as he happened to look towards Fluttershy, noticing how she was suddenly standing on the other side of the room.

"...Shit," he exclaimed. "Fine, we'll put this on hold. But it's *far from over*, dickwad."

Sighing, he pulled out a piece of paper, fumbled at it for several seconds with his hooves, then gave up. "Urgh. There goes making a diagram to explain all this crap. Okay, you deserve an explanation for all that. I didn't...*mean* to scare you. This time, I mean."

"I wasn't scared," Fluttershy said, her body visibly relaxing. "I just thought you might blow up again, so I was trying to-"

"-Get away from the ticking time bomb," he finished. "...can't say I blame you for that. Okay, here's what happened: remember how I told you in my Baseline that I ended up destroying the multiverse? That's only *kind of* true. It *was* me, but it also wasn't.

"Wait, let me go from the top," he said, smacking himself in the face, then grunting as he was unable to balance on only three legs and fell to the floor.

"Basically," Naoki said as he stood back up, "I was tested throughout my journey by *those assholes*," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the door, "and we fought over candelabras, which opened the door to a giant maze full of the *worst traps ever*. I pass all the tests, and learn the whole deal about the Great Will's infinite resets of the universe via the Conception, how he was trying again and again to find a world without free will, all that junk. So, Lucifer offers me power to try and break this system. What he *didn't* tell me was that I wasn't just getting the *heart* of a demon: I was getting the *soul* of one, too. He basically broke open my pysche and pumped metaphysical steroids into my id until it gained sapience. Which...uh...killed me."

"But an Anchor needs to survive a Loop in order for it to run, right? Unless...is it like with Toothless and Hiccup?"

"Co-Anchors, yeah," the demon confirmed. "One second Lucifer is throwing a lightning bolt at me, and the next I'm back on the subway near the hospital. Activating the Loop joined us together, since he basically tore his way out of my soul to exist. Took us a while to stop

arguing-and by the time we did, we died in the Conception. So in the *next* Loop, we shut up long enough to learn what I missed in the rest of Baseline. Some stuff I really *wanted* to stay missed. You know the rest."

Naoki suddenly stopped, his ears twitching.

"What is it?" Fluttershy asked.

"You're...you have a *body* this time?!" Naoki asked his split personality. "The last time we tried that, you *ended up incarnating as a Slime*!...How the hell are we still talking if you're *not* in my mind right now?"

More silence.

"Forget it," he growled. "Guess it doesn't matter. You have any idea where you are?"

Silence again.

"Alright. Just don't kill any tough demons without me," Naoki replied. "A good fight's probably in *short supply* here."

"Will he be alright by himself?" Fluttershy asked, sensing that the inter-personality conversation was over.

"He punched an avatar of the Great Will so hard, it stopped existing in every reality ever. He'll be fine." Slowly, on unsteady legs, Naoki walked over to the door. "Open the door."

He was met by the sound of a blaring trumpet, blowing him backwards and right onto his flank.

"So, no," Naoki confirmed. "The hell do you *want* us to do, then? Sit around and talk about our *feelings*?! I want to get over all this, yeah, but I'm not gonna *hold hands with her and whine about how my life is a literal goddamned mess*. What the hell with *that* solve?!"

"And...we kind of already talked about that when we saw each other again through the Mirror," Fluttershy added.

They were met with no response, save the rumbling of an engine starting up and the Hell Biker driving out of wherever the heck Trumpeter had stuck them.

"The gate has been sealed with my strongest of magics," Trumpeter muttered, "as have the walls, ceilings, and floors. There is no escape 'till you commune and overcome the-"

"You want us to fu-*no!*" Naoki yelled. "Why would you even say that?!"

"Wait." Fluttershy stared at the door. "The doors and walls are all magically reinforced."

"Correct," said the Trumpeter.

"...what about the hinges and locks?"

The Fiend was silent for a few moments.

"Oh, *damna*-"

It was cut off by an adamantium door crashing right into its face.

Slowly, the vines and tendrils of dark magic withered and faded away from where they had wormed into the door and wrenched its workings apart.

"Oh, *no*!" Fluttershy gasped, galloping over to where Trumpeter's body was. Was, as in the past tense: it had vanished in a flash of light mere seconds after it was crushed by the door. "I didn't mean to-"

"Relax," Naoki said, bending down to slowly and carefully pull out the dropped Macca from where the other demon was. "Demons never stay dead where I come from. You kill 'em, and they just pop back up in the Expanse and sulk for a while."

"...your universe is *strange.*"

"Never heard that one before," Naoki muttered, slowly pulling the demonic currency into his Pocket. "Though...I guess I owe you for all that's happened. Where's the local equivalent of hell?"

"Tartarus," Fluttershy automatically answered. "But...why are we going there?"

"Figure this is something anyone who spends any time with someone from Amala needs to know. Ye-*Fluttershy*," he corrected himself, "you're going to learn how to *negotiate* with demons."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 2 and 3
Author: Tincanman125

=== Meanwhile In the Vortex===

"Those kinda look like shadows," Narukami remarked, "Minato you seeing this?" Instead of an answer Narukami received an earful of static.

"Oh well," he shrugged it off, "Let's do this!"

"PERSONA!"

Instead of the usual card wreathed in blue flame materializing in his hand, the device Yu picked up earlier opened and started to glow as Angel and Pixie appeared.

"Well that's new." Yu commented as the Personas started attacking the amorphous creatures, ripping them to shreds without him having to issue a command.

With the pseudo-shadows gone and the storm dispersed, the comms came back to life, "-ay something damn it!"

"Minato? Is that you?" Narukami asked.

"No it's Igor." Minato said, voice dripping with sarcasm, "Of course it's me! What the hell happened?"

"I'm not really sure," Narukami said, "I'll tell you when I get back, first I need to see if the pod's alright."

...

Aldous was once again back in his pod, right after it opened, he had no idea why he always seemed to return to this exact moment, nor why he and Rallen seemed to remember things randomly (If at all), but he did know one thing:

The young man standing over him was most certainly *not* Rallen.

...

Narukami wasn't sure what exactly he expected to happen when the pod opened, so when the man inside jumped out and pinned him to the ground he had been quite surprised.

"Who are you?!" The mystery man shouted at him.

"I'm Yu." He answered, only registering his poor word choice when the man punched him in the jaw.

"Don't you get smart with me boy!" The man yelled, "I'm old, not stupid!"

Choosing his words a little more carefully he responded, "Sorry, I meant that my name is Yu, as in Yu Narukami."

"Oh," The man said looking both calmer and little embarrassed, "I'm sorry, it's just that I was expecting someone else to open my capsule," the man said as got off of Narukami and helped him up.

"If you don't mind me asking, who exactly were you expecting?" Yu asked.

"This is the first time anyone other than Rallen or Jeena has opened my pod," the man replied, "I'm not sure why you're here though."

"Wait, from what you said it sounds like you've had this happen before." Yu remarked.

The man looked a bit uncomfortable, "I doubt I'd be able to explain things in a way you could understand."

"Actually, I think I might know what's going on," Yu told him, "let's head back to my ship, I'll explain on the way.

===Patrol Cruiser 15 Minutes Later===

"Huh," Yu said, "so that's where you were."

"Shut up and get the old man to fix me already." Commented a chibified Izanagi, his voice much squeaker and his usual weapon replaced with a staff.

"First off my name is Aldous," the Spectrobe Master scolded, "and secondly before I do anything of the sort we'd need to find some fossils, or else we'd have no way of searching for resources after you evolve."

"...I'm squeeing internally right now." Minato said.

"Screw you Minako," Iza-chibi said.

"Oh yeah, I forgot I was a girl." Minako mused.

...

"We got some fossils here!" Iza-chibi said as he tapped his staff on the ground twice to indicate the location.

The group had easily worked out an efficient excavation system: Minako would do the actual digging (as she had obtained a paleontology degree a few loops back), Chibi-zanagi would find the minerals and fossils, and Narukami would stand guard against any Krawl that might try to sneak up on them.

Aldous meanwhile was busy working on a 'secret project' back at the ship.

"Pharopod huh?" Minako said, "I think we just found ourselves a replacement scanner."

"Great, someone go wake up creepy kid, I'm headed back to the ship." And with that the pint-sized Persona stormed off.

[Persona 3], [My Little Pony]
Great Seal – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

"So. Um...how's your Nyx?"

"She's fine," Twilight said, sipping her tea and trying to ignore the Royal Guards sitting at either end of the four-seated table, to the sides of herself and the entity currently controlling Starlight Glimmer's body.

"She's still going steady with Lemon Rush," she continued. "And I think she said something about a hot springs trip with Minato during a gender-switched Loop?"

"Eh, he's a girl about half the time now," Ryoji replied, sipping his own cup with Starlight's hooves, speaking in his own, more masculine voice. "Something to do with the Edit knocking

off his gender marker. Even though that...*thing*...isn't in our Loop, it still did something to our Branch since they're connected. The biggest thing were these Persona users from Tokyo getting glitched by-"

He trailed off, as he nervously glanced at the guards. "C'mon, is this *really* necessary?" he whined. "I've got her under control!"

"Be that as it may," one of the guards replied, "the pony you are possessing still committed mass violations of equine rights. Although the Princess confirmed she is no longer a threat," he explained, pointing to Twlight with a forehoof briefly, "Princess Celestia still assigned us to watch you until the trial can begin."

"Or until your friend gets you into another body," the other guard added.

"Oh," Ryoji said. "I guess that makes sense. She *was* being naughty, if you get what I THAT DOESN'T GO THERE!"

He slapped Starlight's hoof to her mouth.

"...um, sorry," he said. "She breaks through sometimes."

"We'll need to call in more backup, just to be sure." One guard took a sending stone out of his saddlebag. "Shining Armor, we'll need two more guards here-"

"That's...not needed," Twilight interrupted, gently pulling the stone out of the guard's hooves with her magic and setting it on the table. "I trust Ryoji enough that he can keep her under control. Though it *is* a temporary solution."

"Yeah, I wanna get this over with too," the Herald of Nyx agreed. "I feel bad for her. Trapped like an animal, with all her freedom stripped from her, not even allowed to move her face or be herself, and I'm suddenly describing *her*, aren't I?" Ryoji shrugged, then yanked a roll out of the breadbasket and popped it into Starlight's mouth.

"Ironic, I guess. So, when is the THAT'S NOT WHAT HOOFCUFFS ARE USED FOR!"

As Starlight briefly took control of her body back, crumbs of the roll lodged themselves in her throat, and she began chocking as Ryoji seized control of their shared form. As the guards gave him the Heimlich Manuever, Twilight rolled her eyes.

"Still heard worse."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 4 to 6
Author: Tincanman125

"Oh yeah," Izanagi said with a contented sigh as he stretched, "this is much better."

"Now that's out of the way, I have a gift for Minako," Aldous said, "it wasn't easy, but I made you Prismod out my pod's life support system," He told her as he handed over the device.

"Thank you very much," Minako said, "now we just need to awaken Pharos."

...

If Izanagi had been good at scanning, then it was fair to say that Pharos was damn near omniscient.

"Show off." Izanagi commented as Pharos found yet another large cluster of minerals.

"Now, now," Pharos chided, "it's not my fault that you can't do anything right if violence isn't involved." Earning a chuckle from Yu.

"I've just gotten a message from headquarters," Aldous said over the comms "we're to return to base, but..." he trailed off.

"Something wrong?" Minako asked.

"The strange thing is that the message was audio only, and I didn't recognize that voice as Commander Grant's." Aldous explained.

"Well staying here isn't going to solve anything," Yu said, "might as well go see what's up."

===Grant's office, Kollin===

"Welcome once again to the Velvet Room," Igor greeted the loopers as they walked in, "ah, I see you've brought a guest," he said as he turned his attention to Aldous, "my name is Igor, might I inquire as to your reason for being here?"

"This is Aldous, he's a native looper." Minako explained.

"I assume he has yet to sign a contract?" Igor inquired.

"Does he need to?" Yu asked.

"The alternative is for him to not set foot in this room till the loop ends if you wish for my assistance," Igor explained, "I do not make the rules, I merely follow them."

"What does this contract entail exactly?" Aldous asked.

Igor simply smiled and snapped his fingers, causing an exact, albeit unsigned, copy of Minako's baseline contract to appear on the desk, Aldous studied it for a few moments before signing.

"Now that bit of formality is out of the way, I believe I should inform you all that due to the unique circumstances that the Velvet Room has manifested itself under, I am allowed to be a bit more....flexible in regards to my typical non-interference clause." Igor informed the group with a cheshire grin on his face. "You will find that many powerful items and weapons are now available to you long before they should be, though compensation for their use will be required," he told them, "on an 'unrelated' note, as you are temporarily under my employ, any

items you should purchase for the completion of your mission shall be filed as 'work related expenses' and shall be paid for by this organization."

"Best. Boss. Ever." Izanagi said.

...

"Igor read my fortune after both of you left." Aldous said.

"So what's the word?" Minako asked.

"He pulled up lovers, flanked by upright hanged man and strength," Aldous told her, "he said it meant we had a choice on how we want to grow stronger, through sacrifice or patience, I assume that by 'patience' he meant that we could use the traditional method of raising spectrobes, having them fight and feeding them until they evolve, which I admit is a lengthy process," he explained, "but I'm not sure what he meant by 'sacrifice'."

"Typically Narukami and I obtain more powerful Personas by 'fusing' two or more lesser ones, the result is a strong Persona with skills inherited from its components." Minako told him.

"I'm guessing he wants us to choose between whether we want more firepower now with decreased diversity, or if we'd rather have more Personas to pick from at the cost of them being weaker for longer," Yu conjectured, "I suggest we use both as the situation calls for it."

"We should probably head to Genshi for now," Aldous said, "if I recall correctly, Doctor Wright is currently being attacked by black vortexes."

===Research Lab, Genshi===

"Are you Digg?" Minako asked, silently wondering why anyone would name their kid something so stupid.

"Yes, I am," Digg said, "Who might you be?"

"I'm Yu Narukami, Nanairo Planetary Patrol," Yu said, flashing his badge the same way he'd seen Naoto and Uncle Dojima do it with their police badges millions of times before, "and this is my partner Minako, we're here because you reported Dr. Wright missing."

"Yes we got separated in the jungle when we were attacked, follow me and I'll show you." Digg said.

===Sometime later===

"Good thing Yukiko wasn't here," Yu sighed, "I don't think she'd have ever stopped laughing if she heard about 'Digg the Paleontologist'."

"Let's just find this guy quick," Minako groaned, "I don't think I can stand this heat much longer."

"At least you both got some pretty cool jetpacks out of this." Pharos commented.

...

It only took a few more minutes of walking before they found Dr. Wright cornered by a trio of black vortexes.

"STAY BACK IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!" The Doctor yelled.

"Calm down," Yu said, "we're here with the NPP, they sent us to rescue you."

"Huh? Rescue me?" Wright asked, surprise evident in his voice.

"Izanagi, cleave them to bits," Narukami ordered,"Pixie keep him healed."

"Got it!" Izanagi responded.

"Orpheus, start spamming Agi skills, Angel start buffing." Minako told her Personas.

Unlike Izanagi, Orpheus gave no acknowledgement, content to play a haunting melody as the Krawl began to burn.

...

The Krawl stood no chance, the fight had been three on four in humans' favor and all that was left of the amoebic creatures was a thin paste-like substance smeared across the ground.

"I-I've never seen anything like that." Dr. Wright said dumbfounded and at a loss for words.

"It was nothing," Minako said, "just your taxpayer money at work."

"Still, I feel like I need to repay you somehow," Wright said, "follow me back to the lab."

...

"I want to give you this fossil, its coloration is highly unusual, and so far we have no clue why," Wright said as he handed over the purple tinted fossil, "everyone else has written it off as a hoax, so I don't see any harm in giving it to you two, it'll make a nice paperweight if nothing else."

"The Prismod can't identify this thing," Yu stated, "we should probably take it back to Aldous."

===Lab/Cargo hold, Ship===

Everyone was gathered around the newly awakened...thing for lack of a better term.

"Doesn't look like any Persona I've ever seen." Izanagi commented.

"The color of the fossil means this should be a dark spectrobe," Aldous said, "but I don't recognize it, and dark spectrobes can't be found in this system."

"It looks like a large crow." Yu remarked.

"I think it's cute." Pharos interjected.

"I guess I'll take care of it then," Minako stated, "but we should probably figure out where we're going next."

"We need to go to Nessa," Aldous told everyone, "a cube we desperately need is there, and unfortunately to get it we have to deal with the most unpleasant man in the entire system."

[Persona Q]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Minato always liked the school's trip to Kyoto. Even with getting Executed nearly every time, it was a rather nice distraction from dealing with the Full-Moon Shadows. Or from his shenanigans, but that wasn't important now. What was important was his quest for sleep as he returned to his assigned room for some shut-eye.

As soon as he slid open the door, all thought and need of sleep evaporated. A figure was standing in the middle of an empty space of space and time, his black tattered cloak clashing with the bright yellow collar it wore.

"Z-Zen! Is that you?"

"Yes. It is a pleasure to meet you again, but I have an urgent problem, that I need help with."

"Of course. What's the problem?"

"I've been noticing that time seems to reset around you and Narukami quite regularly," noticing Minato's shock, he continued. "I don't believe that I am affected by these resets, but this time I can't seem to find Rei anywhere."

"... wait."

...

"Urrrrrrg..."

"So Partner, can you explain this to me?"

"...bluuuuuurg..."

"Well, Yosuke; not much to explain, really. She showed up on my doorstep crying about losing Zen, so I brought her here to Aiba's to cheer her up. From what I gathered, she started Looping very recently, but we have no idea where Zen is at."

"...oooohhhhff..."

"You brought her to Aiba's on a rainy day, where she could get the Mega Beef Bowl. Look at her, she looks like she swallowed a basketball! Oh my god, if even a bottomless pit like her can't even beat the challenge..."

"Actually, this is her fourth bowl. The owner is thinking of signing her on as the challenge's mascot at this point."

"...oooowww..."

"Really? No wonder she looks so sick. But I thought she was a spirit, unable to get full or something, right?"

"I don't know, but right here and now she's a flesh and blood person with all the restrictions that it implies."

"...nom nom nom-"

"Dammit, if you're actually full then stop eating!"

Eventually, Rei was able to eat a total of six Mega Beef Bowls and was recognized as Aiba's mascot. She did the same thing next Loop, too.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 7 and 8
Author: Tincanman125

===Colony, Nessa===

"Well ain't this a surprise," Cyrus said, "I didn't expect the NPP to send someone so easy on the eyes. It almost makes up for the fact that I've been waiting for hours."

"It's not like we came from the next town over," Minako told him, "cut us some slack."

"Anything for a pretty lady," Cyrus replied, "but we're getting off topic, I want something called a blue keystone from the ruins on the other side of the planet, so why don't you go over there and get it for me?"

"What's in it for us?" Narukami asked.

"Well I happen to have this rare cube, the kind you chum-, I mean officers, have put out a bounty on," Cyrus told them with a huge grin on his face, "get me that rock and it's all yours."

"Fair enough," Minako replied.

"Not so fast little lady," Cyrus interrupted her, "I need to make sure you don't just run off with the keystone, so your boyfriend has to stay here."

"He's not my boyfriend." Minako growled.

"So what you're saying is that you're single?" Cyrus asked with a smirk on his face.

===Ruins, Nessa===

"Thanks for agreeing to come along Izanagi." Minako said as she looked around the dark room.

"No problem, I'd be bored to death if I stayed there," Izanagi replied as he held up a improvised torch he made out of a petrified wooden comb Minako found earlier, "plus I heard you were bringing Birdie along, and I kinda want to see how he fights."

'Birdie' was the name the team decided to give to the still unidentified Persona, who had grown even bigger and lost most of it's feathers upon evolving into adult form, additionally its wings had evolved into arms and it had become far more agressive.

"Aldous says he's been attacking anything that moves in the incubator," Minako commented, "I think he'll calm down if he kills a few Krawl though."

Behind the next corner was a black vortex blocking the way, and having no other options, Minako decided to engage.

...

Izanagi managed to get the first hit in with a quick Ziodyne before impaling a Krawl on his naginata.

Meanwhile 'Birdie' had pounced on another enemy and started tearing it apart with his talon-like hands, only stopping when the enemy was reduced to fist sized chunks.

...

"Well, he's certainly enthusiastic, I'll give him that." Izanagi stated in a deadpan manner.

"...Something about that felt familiar, but I can't quite put my finger on it," Minako puzzled, "anyway we should keep moving."

After traversing several sand filled rooms the pair managed to locate the blue keystone and went about the time consuming process of dragging it back to the ship.

===Colony, Nessa===

"So what happened next?" Cyrus asked, clearly invested in the story Yu was telling.

"Ok, here comes the good part," Yu said,"so when they saw the blood on my shirt they naturally assumed it was mine. So I had to explain to them that-"

"Oh hey," Cyrus interupted, "your friend's back." He said as he pointed towards Minako, who was pushing the blue keystone on a hovercart.

"It wasn't easy, but I got your stupid rock," Minako stated, "so where's the cube?"

"Well now," Cyrus commented, "cute and resourceful, you're a real force to be reckoned with ain't ya?" He said as he handed over the zeta cube, "Tell you what, if you kids ever get bored playing cops, give me a call, I might have some work for people like you."

"We'll keep that in mind." Yu said, as he pondered why he seemed to have an unnatural ability to befriend sociopaths.

===Lab/Storage, Ship===

"The final preparations are finished," Aldous told everyone, "we can now unlock the full potential of your 'Personas' just as if they were evolved form spectrobes."

"I vote that Birdie goes first," Yu suggested, "because frankly I want to figure out what that thing is already, and if this doesn't work I don't know what will."

"I'll admit, Birdie does seem ready," Aldous said, "Minako, would you like to do the honors?"

"Sure!" Minako replied, practically giddy with anticipation.

…

"Thou art I," a deep, almost other worldly voice resonated throughout the ship,"and I am thou," it said, sending chills down everyone's spines, "I am Thanatos... I was born of thee, and I shall walk by thy side..."

And with that, death incarnate emerged from his cocoon.

…

"Now I know why the way 'Birdie' fought was so familiar," Minako said aloud, "it's the same way Thanatos destroyed the Magician Shadow back in baseline!"

"Yes, I'm getting a clear reading now," Aldous called out from his position hunched over the lab console, "it says 'Thanatos, Property: Flash, Arcana: Death, Charge Attack: Door of Hades' this will definitely help when the Krawl invade Kollin!"

"...Dr. Wright is my new favorite non-looper." Yu said.

[Persona 4], [Gundam]
Kira Yamato's Design – part 4
Author: Drakohahn

Rise frowned as her Persona scanned the Shadow Self. According to the data, he was very resistant to pretty much everything with physical blows being outright negated. Thankfully, he did have a weakness to Fire. That said, he was also remarkably fast. His main attacks were Fire as well with a few physical attacks to boot.

"Okay guys, he immune to physical attacks, but can be stunned by Fire and his main form of attacks are Fire too. Just keep on him and fight long-term." The fighters nodded at the advice.

With that acknowledgement, the eight teenagers sprang into action alongside their Personas. Blasts of Fire, Wind, Lightning and Ice shot towards the armored form in front of them. The Shadow Kira merely smirked at the oncoming rush of magic, dodging the ice and fire with seeming ease while tanking the faster wind and lightning spells.

"Oh, is that all? Is it my turn yet?" He chuckled haughtily. The protrusions on his back ring came off to reveal themselves as remote drone weapons. They zipped wildly around the Investigation Team for several moments, almost tauntingly. Then the Shadow spoke in a sinister tone, "How long can you survive?"

The drones stopped in midair, barrels aimed at the group. Out of combat reflex, the group scrambled out of the way as green rays of plasma struck the ground they had just been and made glowing hot craters. The Investigation Team immediately realized that this fight wasn't going to be simple. So, the members with defense spells rushed to cast them while others started trying to throw debuffs onto the crazy Shadow Self. He didn't seem bothered when the beams were weaker than his last shot and that they splashed harmlessly against the barriers now surrounding his foes.

"Trying to level out the playing field? That won't work for long, you know!" He taunted while taking some hits of ice and lightning. Then he took a fire spell to the back and fell to the ground. "Shit!"

"Get him while he's down!" Yu shouted as he and Izanagi charged. The rest of the Team followed suit with a battlecry, somehow kicking up a cloud of dust in the process and the sound of a savage beating could be heard as Team members and their Personas kept getting thrown out of the shroud. Eventually, the cloud of dust faded and the Team backed off to catch their breath.

The Shadow Kira recovered after that, returning to the air with a nasty scowl on his face. He grabbed a pair of small devices from his hips and activated them to reveal their nature as blades of plasma. In response, the Team refreshed their defense buffs. With a feral snarl, the mechanically armored Shadow charged.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 9 to 11
Author: Tincanman125

"We got a call from Igor, patching it through now." Minako said as Igor's face appeared on the video screen.

"I trust everything is well on your end?" Igor Inquired.

"Yeah," Narukami responded, "Aldous told us the Krawl are going to attack Kollin, so we're headed back now."

Igor chuckled, "I wouldn't worry about that if I were you, they didn't even reach the upper atmosphere before I wiped them from existence."

"You're that powerful?" Aldous asked, a look of surprise on his face.

"I do work for what essentially amounts to the physical manifestation of all that is good in mankind," Igor replied, "but I'm afraid I've become complacent and overstepped my bounds, my master has warned me not to give a repeat performance."

"So, what you're saying is we're on our own?" Minako asked.

"Not entirely, I am still allowed to preform my regular duties, as well as direct you towards you next objective should you need it, but I am only allowed to provide you with one last favor." Igor explained.

"Which is?" Aldous asked.

"A door connecting directly to the Velvet Room has appeared in your ship's cargo hold should you need it," Igor told them, "I wish you good luck and safe travels." He said as he hung up.

"Well that seems to have worked itself out nicely," Izanagi commented, "so where do we go from here?"

"First we need to get the ship's hull degaussed at one of Kollin's orbital service bays, then we should find Professor Kate on Ziba to acquire her red keystone, and get her to have curator Webster lend us the green keystone."

"Wait if we need the keystones, why did we give one to Cyrus? And for that matter why not get the green keystone from the museum before going to Ziba?" Pharos asked.

"Because I thought we'd need the zeta cube to stop the Krawl invading Kollin, and giving Cyrus the keystone is the fastest way to get it," Aldous explained, "as for the other question, Kate is the only one Webster will listen to, and she only ever agrees to talk to him when we meet her in person for some reason."

"Well at least we can get more fossils on Ziba while we're there," Yu sighed, "sure we picked up a lot every time we visited a new planet, but I for one plan on doing a lot more fusing now that we can access the Velvet Room from anywhere."

...

It had taken a ridiculous amount of time and effort, but Minako and Narukami were finally happy with the Personas that they had fused and evolved, Narukami chose to go into battle with Izanagi-no-Okami and Lucifer, while Minako opted to bring along Orpheus Telos and Thanatos.

The pair made sure that their bases were well covered, Izanagi-no-Okami was classified as the Aurora property, and thus resisted Flash, meanwhile Orpheus Telos and Lucifer both shared the Corona property, and would destroy Aurora enemies, and finally Thanatos' Flash property would deal with any Corona Krawl.

===Orbit over Ziba===

"Everyone brace yourselves," Aldous ordered, "our preparations should make things easier to manage, but as the adage in Nanairo goes: 'There are no smooth landings on Ziba, only controlled crashes.'"

"That's not very comforting." Yu said as his face turned pale.

===Planetside, Ziba===

"I think I'm gonna hurl," Izanagi groaned, "and I'm not even sure if I have a stomach this loop!"

"That was not pleasant." Minako commented as she picked herself up off the floor.

"FiVe MoRe MiNuTeS mOmMy." A dazed Pharos mumbled.

"Good job everyone," Aldous said cheerfully, seemingly oblivious of the state everyone else was in,"that was the most successful touchdown I've had on this planet to date!"

"I'd hate to see what normally happens then." Yu shuddered.

===Kate's Field Research Lab, Ziba===

"These are some strange times we live in," Professor Kate mused as she poured some coffee for herself and her guests, "first these 'black vortexes' show up all over the system," the scientist said as she placed a cup on the table in front of where Aldous was seated, "then an escape pod containing the last known survivor of an entire star system crashes into Daichi, only to be found by the pair of NPP officers with the worst disciplinary record in the history of the organization."

Izanagi, Narukami, and Arisato remained silent as Kate handed them their cups.

"These officers not only learn about the previously unknown hostile alien species behind the aforementioned phenomena, and become hyper-competent seemingly overnight, but they *also* manage to bring fossilized creatures back from the dead to fight the alien menace, and save a famous paleontologist soon afterwards," Kate continued as she handed Pharos a cup of hot chocolate (having decided the boy was to young for coffee), "meanwhile, the commander of the NPP somehow stops the invasion of Kollin within seconds of it starting, causing citizens all over the system to form some weird cult worshiping him, more specifically, his *nose* of all things."

Minako looked a bit uncomfortable upon hearing the word 'cult', but decided to let Kate continue.

"And now, for some reason, all of you are here, in my home, not five minutes after Ziba's moons' sped up their orbits, which is impossible for them to do under their own power according to all currently known laws of physics I might add; with some random child and a floating man with blades instead of legs, asking for my help." Kate said as she massaged her temples and sat down,"Did I miss anything?" She asked, clearly stressed.

"Well we did crawl through some ruins on Nessa," Izanagi remarked, "but that really wasn't too important anyway."

Kate sighed, "Look, I don't think I can even begin to understand what's going on here," she said, "I'll give Webster a call, and you can have the keystone, just *please* promise me that things will start making sense again soon."

"Don't worry," Yu told her, "it'll all be over soon."

…

Intermission: ===Elsewhere in the Multiverse===

"I can't believe you took that bullet for me," Shinjiro said as he stood over Rallen's hospital bed, "you barely even know me for crying out loud!"

Rallen gave a weak chuckle,"I'm an officer of the law back home," he said, his voice barely audible, "protecting civilians at all costs is part of the job in the NPP."

Mitsuru sighed, "No wonder your Persona is Icarus," she scolded, "you're far too reckless!"

===Junes department store, Inaba===

"I must say," Naoto remarked, "it's been a while since I've seen a Persona so focused on healing skills."

"I guess Cassandra makes sense," Jeena sighed, "I'm always warning Rallen not to rush into things without thinking," she told Naoto, "I just wish he'd listen more often, I've had to patch him up more times then I care to remember before the commander just gave up and had a healing pod installed in our ship."

Miscellaneous part 9

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – part 12
Author: Tincanman125

===Akaboshi, Moon of Ziba===

"Damn it," Yu swore, "the big Krawl wasn't on Aoboshi and we haven't found a single trace of it here, so where the heck is it?

"I don't know," Minako replied, frustration evident in her voice, "but at this point I'm seriously considering blowing up both of these moons and calling it a day."

"I've got good news and bad news." Aldous said over the comm.

"What's the good news?" Yu asked.

"I've found the Vilokken agent we're looking for." Aldous replied.

"And the bad news?" Minako asked.

"It's attacking the ship, and it just took out the engines." Aldous told them.

The duo could only groan at their poor luck.

…

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?" Narukami asked.

"If what you're seeing is a tentacle monster with a cone of scrap metal on it confusing our ship for a potential mate, then yes I am." Izanagi deadpanned.

"Let's see just how tough it is shall we?" Minako asked, "Orpheus Telos, blast it with a Morning Star!"

At Minako's order the Persona launched a blast of Almighty energy at the Krawl, the attack kicking up a large cloud of dust as it connected.

"Think it's dead?" Pharos inquired.

"If it's not then it's probably in a lot of pain right now." Izanagi commented.

The dust suddenly cleared as the monster shot towards Orpheus nose cone first while spinning like a drill; with the force of the impact sending the Persona crashing into a nearby canyon wall.

"Yeah, I probably should have seen that coming," Izanagi said as he turned to Yu, "want me to try?" He asked.

"You might as well." Yu told him.

With that Izanagi-no-Okami unleashed a powerful Myraid Truths, only for the Vilokken to ascend rapidly into the atmosphere to avoid it, and causing the attack to carve a perfectly circular cave into the canyon (said cave would later become a popular tourist attraction, but that's a story for another time).

"This is getting old fast," Yu said, "I think it's about time to try out what we've been practicing."

"Agreed." Minako said with a knowing grin.

…

"Thanatos!" Minako yelled.

"Lucifer!" Yu called out.

"**All Out Attack: Fall From Grace!**" The pair shouted.

…

Thanatos let out a roar as his chains dug into the rocks below, only to burst out of the ground beneath the Vilokken and entangle it, bringing the beast crashing down and pinning it.

Next Lucifer flew up into the air and rained down powerful Almighty spells on the unfortunate Krawl, causing massive damage to the creature.

Once more it was Thanatos' turn to strike, as he used his sword to stab an exposed piece of the monster's flesh before shifting his grip to allow Lucifer to grab the weapon as well.

Then both of the Personas began to channel energy into the blade that was still stuck in the Krawl's skin, Thanatos channeling darkness, and Lucifer using light.

The massive amounts of energy being poured into it caused the Vilokken agent to explode in a rather impressive manner, with the light generated being able to be seen from Ziba's surface.

[Devil Survivor 2], [Pokémon]
Al Psyduck
Author: Gamerx27

"-use Sacred Fire!"

Chimchar blinked as he Awoke in a new Loop. He slowly pulled back his outstretched paw, which had been a hand a few seconds ago from his perspective, and rolled his eyes.

"Hate it when that happens," he muttered, strolling down the beach. "Wonder if Piplup is up for tricking Team Skull into stealing some other fruit? Pears? Bananas, maybe?"

"Nhhn."

"Speak of the Darkrai," the Anchor muttered, carefully making his way to the shoreline, treading slowly so as to not get himself wet (as it *still* tended to sting, no matter how many Loop powers helped him resist water burns). "Hey, there! Are you feeling Loopy?"

"Please...not so loud," the facedown Pokemon said. Chimchar quickly realized that this wasn't Piplup. Not because he was a Psyduck: species switching was often with their Loop. No, because his voice was totally different. Somehow, this new Looper carried an air of mystery and grace in his voice alone.

Though the undercurrents of pain *did* lessen the effect by a good deal.

"Oh. Sorry," Chimchar gently grabbed the Psyduck's hand and pulled him to his feet, ignoring the pins-and-needles on his paw from having to dip it in the ocean. "You Awake?"

"If by that, you mean that I have regained my memory of past Cycles, then yes." Once he was steady on his feet, the mystery Looper looked at the Anchor and smiled. "Ah. You must be a Pokemon. The Folder from which one of the animes the Shining One enjoys originates."

"That's...not the right terminology, but yeah, we're Pokemon. So are you, at the moment."

As the new Looper massaged his temples, he glanced downwards. "So I am. There are many breeds, correct? Which one have I taken the form of?'

"Psyduck. It's a Water Pokemon-"

He was cut off by soft chuckling. The other Looper brought a hand up to his mouth, trying to hold in his laughter, then winced again from the perennial headache of the species.

"Forgive me. It's...amusing that Yggdrasil makes such strange connections between individual datum. My name is Al Saiduq."

Chimchar wasn't sure whether to groan or laugh at the realization that Yggdrasil put a Looper in another Branch because of yet *another* pun, so he did neither. Instead, he held out his paw to shake. "Nice to meet you, Saiduq, I'm Chimchar."

Blinking, Saiduq hesitantly stuck his hand out parallel to Chimchar's paw. Sighing, the Fire-Type Pokemon grasped his hand and shook.

"Ah, yes. Forgive me: I did not realize that greetings via handshake were so universal. As such..." Saiduq trailed off, leaning to the side to look beyond Chimchar.

"Oh, right. It's now."

With that, Chimchar whirled around and breathed fire right into Zubat's face as he tried to lift the Relic Fragment out from his pack.

Screeching in pain, Koffing was likewise repulsed by a blast of psionic energy from Al Saiduq. After considering that instinctive reaction for a moment, he stretched out his hand and **BOOOOOOOOM**

…

As the evil duo went blasting off (again) into the sky, Chimchar cleared the embers out of his throat, and returned to their prior conversation. "Don't worry, those headaches will stop after you evolve."

"I am glad to hear it." The alien entity turned his gaze towards the town in the distance. "A settlement? The inhabitants of this world...I see." He muttered something to himself about the spark of free will/creative potential, and smiled, managing to shut down his headache for the moment with a quick molecular reorganization of his neural chemistry. "I would like it very much if I could see this town for myself, Chimchar."

"Alright. We usually go there anyways." As the two began to walk off the beach, he decided to fill the guest Looper in on some current events. "Okay, some important stuff about this Loop. We've got a stock bad future, because the god of time's gone nuts, and there's also a dimensional..."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – part 13
Author: Tincanman125

Apparently the team had lucked out for once. They had quickly discovered that the Vilokken had merely managed to knock the wires running from the control console to the engine loose by rattling the ship.

"I'm glad that was an easy fix," Yu said, "I know we could have just used the door to the Velvet Room to get back to Kollin, but there's no telling how long it would have taken to get a new ship."

"Speaking of the Velvet Room, I'm probably going to need to see Igor again soon," Minako sighed. "Orpheus Telos went down surprisingly quickly for all the effort I had to put in to get him this loop."

"Are you going to ask him to fuse Messiah again?" Pharos asked.

"Yeah," Minako replied, "Igor is still maintaining the Compendium, so I wouldn't lose Thanatos for too long anyway."

"Good plan," Izanagi commented, "even with the powers I've picked up that thing *still* gives me a hard time whenever I have to fight it."

"So it's settled then," Aldous stated. "Minako will pay Igor a visit, meanwhile the rest of us will pick up the green keystone from the museum."

===Museum, Kollin===

"All hail the Lord of the Great Schnozzola!" A strange shirtless man on a crate yelled outside of the museum, "For he has come to deliver us from the threat of the Xeno, the Mutant, and the Heretic!"

"...I guess this was what Professor Kate was talking about when she mentioned that Igor had a cult." Aldous said, exasperated.

"Go on ahead without me," Yu told Aldous, "I need a video of this in case I ever need to blackmail Igor for some reason." He explained, "After that I'll probably take this nutcase in for disturbing the peace or something."

[Devil Survivor 2]
Activation snip – part 1
Author: Alternis_Alcor

As Sunday continued to crawl on by, a single person stood out amongst the crowded streets of Tokyo, but at the same time he remained unseen. Al Saiduq, as he preferred to be called now, had noticed time seemed to reset around him several dozen times so far. He could remember every iteration of the same week; even when there were subtle changes, like the demons people would call out or the major ones, where a person's whole character was changed.

He found that the few times he had died simply led to a new iteration, but when one of the others died, no such change would occur. He had found it to be quite lonely when he was the only one noticing the resets. When Hibiki started to notice them was a day he remembered fondly, as he was no longer alone.

The next were the Shining One's friends, Daichi Shijima and Io Nitta, who had the closest bonds to the boy. The only other one was Yamato Hotsuin, the leader of JP's. So far, only those four people were aware of what was going on, and it was only so often that they were… 'awake' all at the same time. Like now, actually.

Earlier, Al Saiduq had slain the one who would cause an ordeal for this world; Polaris, the Administrator of the Akashic Records, which meant that she was in charge of their reality. Whenever he didn't kill her right off.

Doing so would keep the ordeal from happening, and the first time he did it he thought that time would be fixed. Instead, even though the week was a quiet one, at the end time reset. The ordeal occurred and they saw their world deleted once again.

He felt that his friends, something he was quite happy to have, needed a rest after the last few iterations where everything just went… weird, but he noticed something that worried him. He couldn't figure out what had happened exactly, but he needed to find Hibiki so they could talk about it. Something had happened, and he had to find out what it was.

…

Hibiki and his friends were sitting at a table in a little cafe they had found, where he decided to treat them after the entrance exams.

The maids in the cafe cosplaying as different demons were just a bonus. Really.

“I don’t remember this place being here before. Hell, I don’t think it was here this morning!” Daichi commented, as he was served by a maid dressed like a pixie. He had a lot of trouble not staring at the girls.

Hibiki chuckled at Daichi’s nervous expression, “I felt that we needed to relax a bit, so what better way than building a new cafe? Getting the demons to actually work here was a bit of a challenge, though.”

“Wait, hang on. How did you build a cafe so quickly, let alone convince demons to work as maids!?”

Io had an inkling as to the how, “Does this have anything to the Records? That’s the only way I can think of that can make such a quick change.”

Hibiki nodded, “Yeah, I found out that I could access them though my phone ever since I became the Record’s administrator that one time near the beginning. I can’t do anything on a worldwide scale or create new things, but I can sort of ‘edit’ anything that exists on a smaller scale like making an old dilapidated building into a cafe.”

Daichi and Io were shocked, they didn’t know that he could do this. Daichi had to know, “So does that mean you can do something about the Septentrions?”

Hibiki shook his head, “No. The most I could do was change their attacks to become weaker and screw over Benetnasch’s Pacify Skill , and that was after a lot of trial and error. Mostly I just see what changes I can make to us whenever I can.”

Io nodded, and remembered one of the resets. “So the time that all the boys were turned into girls was your doing?”

“WHAT?”

“Ha ha, yeah that was my work. It was pretty funny watching all of you try to figure that one out.”

“Dude, that wasn’t funny! Do you know how much trouble that caused! I still have trouble going to the right bathroom!”

“Don’t worry, Daichi. I was only trying to lighten things up that time.”

“Even so, that was a serious misuse of power Shining One.”

The three friends turned in surprise and saw Al Saiduq behind them, wearing his gentle smile as always.

“Dude, that still scares us, you know. Seriously, make some noise before just popping out of nowhere.” After all this time and he still manages to scare them.

“My apologies, but I needed to speak with the Shining One about his use of the Records. You are welcome to stay if you wish.” After Daichi and Io decided to stick around, the Septentrion continued. “Using the Akashic Records like this is something you can't take lightly. Even for a prank, that was irresponsible.”

Hibiki sighed. “Yeah, but I just wanted to… cheer everyone up, with time repeating and everything. All the problems that happen could end up hurting them.”

Daichi spoke up, “Yeah, but most of the time Al over here just takes out Polaris at the start, leaving us with some peace and quiet whenever the Triangulum don’t show up again.”

Io noticed Hibiki was starting to sweat a bit, and came to a realization. “You’re trying to cheer yourself up, aren’t you?”

As though he was struck by the statement, he tried to deny it. “That’s not it at all! You know me, I’m the second mellowest person after Joe! Why would I need to cheer myself up?”

Daichi was beginning to piece together his own hypothesis, “Did something happen when Io and I weren’t around or something?” ‘This is starting to become like those Ace Attorney games!’

At his recoil, Al Saiduq said, “Does it have to do with that iteration we went through?”

Hibiki froze and couldn’t answer, so Io asked, “What happened? Were we not ‘awake’ for this?”

“No. To put it simply, everything went to hell.” To hear Al Saiduq say something like that was enough to show how bad it was. “The Shining One and I were the only ones to see it, and the only ones to survive.”

With hesitation, Hibiki nodded. “We usually all stay together during the week and team up at the end, but everyone just ended up dying one by one. I couldn’t get over it so I spent all these resets trying to distract myself with the pranks and stuff. I’m sorry if I did hurt your feelings doing it, but I just couldn’t stand thinking about it anymore.”

Anything else he was going to say disappeared as Io gave him a comforting hug. “You don’t have to endure it alone, Hibiki. You have us with you to help.”

Daichi nodded, “Yeah. After all you did to help us before this all started, it’s the least we can do to return the favor. Speaking of which, I’m gonna get you back for turning me into a girl.”

Even with tears in his eyes, Hibiki fired back, “You’re just jealous you were even smaller that Airi.”

As everyone laughed, Hibiki was glad that he didn't have to be alone.

Daichi then had a thought, and turned to Saiduq. “Hey, have you been able to figure out what's going on yet?”

The Septentrion shook his head, “I have not. Even checking the Records only results in errors when I look through them.”

“Then it’s a good thing someone does know!”

Surprised, they looked at their phones and saw two familiar faces. “Hey, Tico! And Tico. We haven’t seen you in a while.” Hibiki had noticed that they were usually gone during the resets, so he was glad to see that they were okay.

“It is good to see you too, Misters Kuze and Shijima. And you as well, Miss Nitta.”

“Master had us looking everywhere in the Records trying to figure out why time was starting over and over and over and-”

“And we may not have found an answer, but we received an e-mail from someone who claims that they can tell us everything.”

Al Saiduq was surprised at this. “Does the message say anything else.?”

“He’s waiting with Yammy over at JP’s to speak with all of us right now!”

“Very well. Thank you both for your help.” Turning to his friends, Saiduq said, “We can finally get the answers we need. If they could contact the Ticos while they were in the Records, then this person can surely help us.”

Daichi was excited. “Well what are we waiting for? Lets go!”

Io agreed with him, “We can’t let this chance slip by.”

“Yeah! Let's vamanos!”

“Again with the spanish?”

“Indeed. Hang on, I can get us there quickly.”

Daichi realized what he had planned, “Wait no, not agai-”

And in a blink the four were gone, leaving a table full of food and an angry demon maid. “What the hell, they didn’t even pay!”

…

Appearing in JP’s Tokyo Branch, they hurried to find Yamato.

“So are we going to use the headquarters as our own secret clubhouse now? I feel as if I should start charging for this.”

Hibiki just laughed, “Don’t worry Yammy, we know you like having us here.”

“Stop calling me that. Anyway, the one you’re looking for is in the meeting room. Follow me.”

Leading them to the meeting room, they saw a tall individual who was the very image of the hero Masakado. Even the one they could summon couldn’t hold a candle to this guy.

“Greetings. My name is Masakado, the Admin for the Amala Branches of Yggdrasil. Now, we have much to discuss.”

[Persona 3], [Doctor Who]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

"Why a gun?"

As the Vashta Nerada were burned away in Orpheus Telos's cleansing fire, Minato lowered his Evoker from his head and glanced back at the Doctor. "Huh?"

"Why does it have to be a gun?" he continued, his trenchcoat swaying as he pointed at the magitech device now holstered at Minato's belt. "Why not...well, *anything else?!*"

"That's how using a Persona works." Pausing his phone's music app, he nimbly leapt over one of the unfortunate souls killed by the shadows and looked at the Doctor, head tilted slightly in confusion. "Unless you've got a shortcut, like from Philimon or being in a place close to his realm, you need to get your 'flight or fight,' reflex going. You need to get your body under stress. The kind of stress when you're about to die."

"Right, I get that," the Doctor muttered, pacing around the room and checking for more "off" shadows. "But why not a knife? An adrenaline pump? A pin in your palm? A great big *shock?* Anything *other than* a gun?"

"...okay, I understand that you don't like killing-neither do I-and guns are usually weapons. But this one isn't." He drew the Evoker, pointed it at the wall, and pulled the trigger. An empty click sounded. He held it with one hand, pointing to the total lack of an ammo pack and place to put gunpowder. "What's the problem? You've never had a problem with weapons before. Remember the big wasp, and how you cut one of its wings off?"

"Because a gun is nothing *but* a weapon." Flicking his sonic screwdriver on, he ran it across some of the walls. "A sword kills, yeah, but it can do more. Cut ropes, give you a shave and a haircut, a lever, and a door-opener. If you've got a lightsaber or laser sword anyways." Frowning, the Time Lord slipped a lightsaber from out of his sleeve and slashed it against the wall. As the shadows were seared into nothingness by the weapon's light, he turned back to his current companion. "But those don't do anything *but* kill. They can't. And I've had enough killing in my lifetime....'specially in the Time War."

Both of them were silent for some time.

"Not like *I'm* holding you at gunpoint to make you...uh, use a gun anyways," the Amalan Looper finally said. "But not all monsters can be outsmarted or beaten with words. *You* know this. You've got a death count. That's... hypocritical, from you."

The Doctor breathed in heavily, and exhaled. "Still a last resort," he replied. "Suppose you've got a point, though. Isn't a real gun, anyways."

"Doctor."

As he strode across the room and unlocked the TARDIS, he turned back. "Yeah?"

"Lots of monsters are immune to bullets, anyways," Minato said, smirking. "Ever tried magic?"

"Weee~eeell, yeah. 'Couse, it's not *really* magic-Clarke's Third Law and all-but I got it. Still don't like it, but I can make some Daleks into ice cubes when I need to."

"*Just* ice cubes?" Minato asked, chuckling as he followed the Doctor into his home/lover. "That's thinking a bit small. Try freezing every cell in their bodies. Works as a nonlethal distraction, too, if you do it for a second or so. Here, let me bring in Loki to show you how it works."

As the familiar sound of the TARDIS vanishing echoed through the Library, a booming gunshot was heard, followed by an English accent's cry of, "Oi! Put some trousers on your true inner self, willya?!"

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 14 and 15
Author: Tincanman125

===Colony, Nessa===

Cyrus pinched the bridge of his nose, "Of course you want want the blue keystone now." He sighed, "Every time I have one someone wants me to fork it over, but why should I give it to you?" He asked.

"The reasons aren't important," Narukami stated, "we just need to know your price."

"Well at least you're all smart enough to know better than to just demand it for free." Cyrus said, "So I'll make you a deal: I want a diamond mineral from Daichi's Table Top Mountains, you bring me one, and I'll give it to you."

"Sounds simple enough," Minako commented, "so what's the catch?"

Cyrus grinned, "Daichi's Aurora comes extremely close to the planet's surface there, you enter the area without protection, and you'd be dead within minutes."

"So we're screwed then?" Narukami asked.

"Nope," Cyrus told them, "there are special 'Corona suits' floating around which can stop it from killing you. The problem is that they happen to be pretty rare."

"Glad we already have a pair then." Minako remarked. "But wouldn't an Aurora suit work too?"

"Nah, that's just as bad as wearing normal clothing." Cyrus told her. "But no sense in worrying bout that, you two are prepared, so just get going."

=== Back at the Patrol Cruiser===

"Now I know why Igor suggested I fuse multiple Corona property Personas," Minako said, "but I don't know why he suggested I make twelve when we can only use four between the two of us."

"Hold on," Aldous interrupted, "you mean you *didn't* know that each Prizmod allows it's wielder to use six Spectrobes, or Personas in this case, in battle?" He asked, "Rallen pretty much figured it out right away, so I had assumed you had as well."

"What?" Yu asked. "I knew it could hold up to six, but since they never appeared in battle we only ever brought two along each." He explained.

"Now that I think about it, we've been working under the assumption that we were just using the power of the wild card like normal and that the Prizmod just functioned like an evoker." Minako mused, "And unlike the usual rules our powers operate under when we're together, we've been able to change our main Persona at will, and our sub Personas aren't usually this strong either."

"Well I may not understand exactly how both of your powers work," Aldous told them, "but usually the Prizmod allows one to have two Spectrobes fighting at once, and up to four 'support' Spectrobes providing passive benefits such as increased attack power to the ones that are in combat."

Yu facepalmed, "I can't believe we didn't ask Igor if there was anything different about the wild card, it's usually the first thing I do in a unfamiliar fused loop."

"To be fair, we were all pretty excited about him giving us a blank check for supplies the first time we saw him." Pharos pointed out. "Besides, we could just ask him now, we do have a direct connection to the Velvet Room in the cargo hold."

"Right," Izanagi agreed, "let's go see what The Nose knows."

Everyone else groaned at the bad pun.

===Velvet Room===

"I see that you finally figured out the discrepancies between how your powers usually behave and how they work now." Igor commented.

"Normally I'd chalk it up to being in a different loop," Minako explained, "but the mechanics of using our Personas seems to match up a little *too* perfectly to the Prizmod's intended function."

"I shall attempt to explain as best I can then." Igor told the group. "The way the power of the wild card works mirrors social interactions, when one with the Fool Arcana is alone, it acts as an individual would, allowing one to freely adapt to the trials they face. When two Fools are together it reflects a bond between partners, with the 'main' Persona representing the dominant individual, the one who needs to be strong and unchanging to give the 'sub' something to latch onto. Meanwhile the 'sub' or weaker partner focuses on adapting to help the 'main' deal with their shortcomings."

"Then why has it changed now?" Narukami asked.

"Because when there are *three or more* Fools, the wild card represents group dynamics, each individual contributes something, be they plans, experience, or resources; though they shall always have a leader with more influence than the others." Igor replied.

"Wait a second," Izanagi interupted, "are you telling us that-"

"Indeed, Aldous is the third, like the Fool he left his home on a journey to find something important, and because you have been looking to him to tell you where to go next he has naturally assumed the role of 'leader'," Igor explained, "thus the power of the wild card has molded itself based on his experiences."

"But he doesn't even have a Persona." Pharos pointed out.

"Lacking the ability to manifest a Persona is not the same as lacking a Persona itself," Igor stated, "and he is still able to influence the the wild card even if his power has not yet awakened, given time he will be able to use his ability in the same manner as the both of you."

"I will?" Aldous blinked in surprise.

"Hold on," Yu said, "you told us that 'everyone contributes something' so what do Minako and I contribute?"

"Simple," Igor said, "you contribute the ability to change Personas in battle as opposed to merely outside of battle, something that could not be done otherwise, in addition, your presence is why Personas can be fused at all."

Satisfied with Igor's answers, the group decided to leave the Velvet Room and continue on their mission.

[Devil Survivor 2]
Activation snip – part 2
Author: Alternis_Alcor

“So let me see if I got this right. There is this big ol’ tree called Yggdrasil, which holds all of reality in it apparently, and something broke it. Now every individual reality is constantly ‘Looping’ indefinitely as you Admins try to fix it.” Daichi was amazed that he was actually keeping up with this stuff. It usually went over his head.

Masakado nodded and said, “Yes, Shijima-san. These Loops are based around an Anchor to stabilize the repeating time. For this world, Alcor - oh pardon, Al Saiduq is the Anchor.”

Io was stuck on one certain part of the Admin’s explanation. “You said that you had a lot of trouble getting our world Looping, right? What exactly happened?”

“Polaris happened. Before we could even start, we had to make sure that all the damage she did in the baseline wouldn’t interfere with the Looping process. Her deletion of your world caused a lot of problems, there was missing data on many things. We had to use a similar branch to help make a hard copy to save the data, for lack of a better explanation. Now, even if the world disappears now, it will cause the Loop to crash and reset.”

“What of the Records, then. If a visiting Looper reaches them, could they have any control over it?” Saiduq wanted to make sure that no one could do as they please with thier world.

“We have made precautions to make sure that no one will be able to use the Akashic Records outside of what you need it for in baseline. Through some heavy patching courtesy of Skuld, the Chief Debugger, you cannot access the Records in other worlds you will no doubt Loop into. This is because they were patched to only work for this world only, and as part of the world’s system you won’t be able to take it with you.”

Yamato looked over to Hibiki in thought. “What of Kuze’s control of the Records? I would have thought you would have made limits on that, if not outright remove it.”

“We have placed some serious patches on Kuze-san already. That he even has that little control over the Records is astounding.”

“Wait, changing people’s genders and making demon maids is considered LITTLE control?”

“Yes, as I said he was heavily patched. The changes he *can* do is limited to you and your friends and locations within his immediate surroundings. Even then, the Records will only allow him to use them in *this* world. The demon issue is nothing new considering the Amala Branches use such mechanics on a daily basis.”

“...that is somewhat worrying to me.”

“Does anything not worry you, Shijima?”

“As I was going to say, I had actually intended to meet with Kuze-san about his use of the Records. But, as you lot have already addressed that issue prior to our meeting, I believe that we can let you keep this bit of power for now. We will be monitoring you for some time, but I feel that we can hold off of further patching if you show some restraint. I might get yelled at, but I am willing to do this.”

Hibiki nodded. “I understand, and thank you for trusting me enough for a second chance.”

“Indeed. At least you cause less problems that others in the multiverse. Still, some of us have found some amusement in your use of the Records.”

Al Saiduq had an idea that worried him then. “How many of use would be able to Loop? Would we need to watch out for Polaris?” That had caught everyone’s attention. If the ‘administrator’ of Heaven’s Throne started Looping, then who knew what she could cause.

“Have no worries. As I have said, we made plenty of precautions. We have made sure that she would never activate as a Looper. Neither will Canopus.”

Hibiki nodded. “Ah, right. Forgot about him.” Daichi, Io, and Saiduq all blushed in embarrassment, having also forgotten about the ‘Divine Order of the Universe’; Yamato just didn’t care.

“We have taken measures to keep him from attacking unless the baseline runs, so you won’t have to worry about him all too much. Now, unless there is anything else, let us adjourn this meeting.”

…

As he stood tall atop Tokyo’s Sky Tower, Al Saiduq was pondering. After the meeting with the Admin (who had decided to take a week off for a mini vacation) he had separated from his friends to think.

If there was always an Anchor in any given Loop, and if he was replaced, could the visiting Anchor be able to help stop Polaris and Canopus? If he wasn’t Awake, would the visiting Anchor befriend him or claim his life when they found out his identity? He spent some time wondering these and many more questions, when he felt two presences behind him.

“My lord, is there anything we can do to help you?” Fallen Botis of the Goetia, a servant of Al Saiduq, had been worried when his master disappeared. When he returned he was beset by a melancholy mood since.

“Hee probably found an excuse to go all ‘Anguished One’ or something, hoo.” Jaki Black Frost was not as worried. He and Botis may not have gotten along, but he was better than being around Fallen Bifrons any day.

“Do not worry, Botis. I am merely worried for this world’s future, about things I have no control over.”

“But you have slain Polaris, do you not have control over the Records?”

Remembering Masakado’s words, he replied, “I have no more control over them as does a man over time.” Although that might not be all true anymore. With the Loops occurring, any Looper could do anything he decided, and pick the other choice the next Loop. Or just do whatever, there was no set path anymore. Not with the Records basically locked out from him.

But then he thought; if there was no set path anymore, how would man grow? If Loopers were no longer bound by time's finality of death, where would their paths take them? The sudden thought excited him greatly.

Suddenly, he wanted to see how other worlds grew. This world flourished when he gave them fire and the arts. How had others flourished, how had people become who they were? These Loops would give him these answers, he knew this for fact.

"I think hee had an empathy or something, hoo."

"Epiphany, you overgrown snowball."

But even when he desired to see these other worlds, he had a duty to this world first. He would not willingly abandon this world for his fancies, and he would never give up his friends. He had learned this from his best friend, Hibiki Kuze, after all, who had not left any of his friends behind, no matter what path he took.

"You know, I do not feel worried anymore. Let's go, my friends."

"I guess that enethy worked, hee hoo."

"Now you're just doing this on purpose."

Alcor the Sword of Polaris, who took the name Al Saiduq the Anchor, could only laugh as his demon friends bickered as only demons could. 'How would other worlds benefit from Nicea, I wonder?'

…

Hibiki, Daichi, and Io eventually returned to the demon cafe, and the maids made them work there for making them waste food and for not paying.

"Gotta say Daichi, we make these maid outfits work." Hibiki decided to roll with this as he changed Daichi and himself into girls to better fit the dresses.

"Dude." Daichi decided that this was one of the worst things that happened to him so far into these Loops.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 16 to 21
Author: Tincanman125

===Table Top Mountain Plateau, Daichi===

The climb up the mountain had been ridiculously easy, thanks in no small part to Lucifer's utterly broken combination of Armageddon and Victory Cry, and the tree stump containing the Diamond mineral was just ahead, as was the Vilokken agent waiting to ambush them; so the pair decided to take a break.

"So you and Marie huh?" Minako asked.

"What about us?" Yu responded.

"I'm just saying, you did bring Kaguya Hime up here." Minako teased.

"You do realize that you brought Messiah and Cybele right?" Narukami teased right back. "Don't they represent you and Yukari?"

The pair shared a laugh.

"It's been nice spending time like this with you, I really wish we could do it more often." Minako said.

"Remember the last time we went through the Group Date Café labyrinth?" Yu asked.

"Yeah, it was suprising when everyone fell through the floor at the end," Minako chuckled, "I wonder what that actually meant though?"

Yu shrugged.

===Some time later===

The Vilokken looked like a large crystal top held together by the Krawl fused to it, normally a simple Armageddon attack would be enough to destroy it, but the pair really didn't want to risk destroying what they came for.

Cybele had been unloading massive amounts of Myriad Arrows on the thing, Lucifer and Messiah had been doing their best to keep the creature still, and Kaguya had been healing Cybele to allow her to continue pressing the attack.

The fight itself was simple, the problem was that the Vilokken itself had been extremely durable, and as such had required an incredibly long time to take down.

•••

"I'm too tired to actually dig up this damn thing." Minako sighed.

"I think I might have a solution." Yu said.

"Really? What is it?" Minako asked.

"Why not try hooking the sonic tool to your music player and blasting 'Burn My Dread' at full volume?" Yu suggested.

"I like the way you think Narukami." Minako smirked.

===Colony, Nessa===

"Ok I give," Cyrus sighed, "what's with the sack?"

Instead of answering, Narukami and Minako dropped the bag, causing thousands of Diamond minerals to spill out.

"H-how did you get this many?" A flabbergasted Cyrus asked.

"Well..." Yu trailed off as he rubbed the back of his head.

===Earlier, Daichi===

"I can't believe we made it out in time." Minako said as she stopped to catch her breath.

"Uh, look behind you." Narukami told her.

"Oh we are so screwed!" Minako yelled as she turned around and saw a giant pile of rubble where the mountain once stood.

"Let's just hope something survived." Narukami said grimly.

===Present===

"We really don't want to talk about it." Yu said.

"From now on *you owe us* Cyrus," Minako told him, "you're going to tell us *anything* we want to know *whenever* we want to know it, and you're giving us that keystone."

"For this much I'd give you my firstborn if you asked." Cyrus told them. "The keystone will be loaded onto your ship when you get back."

===Ruins, Nessa===

One of the Vilokken had come crashing through a wall as Minako and Yu were setting the keystones, the creature as a vaguely humanoid shape with bits of rubble sticking out of its body in various places.

"You know, this has pretty much become a chore by now." Minako stated. "Izanagi, would you and Thanatos kindly send this thing back outside?"

At Yu's command Izanagi and Thanatos rammed the beast, sending it flying back out of the hole in the wall it had entered from, meanwhile Minako and Narukami walked outside as well, with Messiah and Lucifer following close behind.

...

"Wanna toy with it a bit, or just finish it off now?" Yu asked.

"Let's just kill it quick and get back to what we were doing." Minako sighed.

"Lucifer"

"Messiah"

"Rapture!" The duo ordered.

…

Lucifer floated just above Messiah's head, with a faintly glowing light connecting them,The Light-Bringer's power being shared with the Savior of Mankind.

Messiah uttered a single word in some language that neither Yu nor Minako could understand, which was surprising, seeing as both of them were practically omniglots after so many loops.

Suddenly spears of light began to rain down from the sky, vaguely reminding those present of how they'd heard a Gungnir strike described a while back from an Admin, albeit on an extremely less destructive scale than the real thing.

Each spear of holy light caused the Vilokken to writhe in pain as they hit, and each one had exploded shortly after impact, eventually there was nothing left but a small crater; and even that would soon be filled by the desert sand.

…

Aldous had landed the ship right next to the hole in the ruins, meanwhile the others had set the keystones into place, and everyone had decided to take a break.

"I want you to have this." Minako said as she handed Aldous an Evoker.

"Is this some sort of weapon? I've never seen anything quite like it before." Aldous told her.

"Sort of," Minako replied, "it's called an 'Evoker', I used to need one to summon my Persona, now I can without one, but it does ease the process." Minako explained. "The design is based off a ballistic weapon called a 'gun'."

"Ah, no wonder I didn't recognize it!" Aldous explained. "The people of Giorna used to have such weapons in the past, but they haven't seen usage for thousands of years."

"Anyway, since Igor thinks you can summon a Persona, I want you to practice using it." Minako told him. "All you need to do is point it at your head and pull the trigger, your instincts should take over from there."

"I see," Aldous said, "thank you very much, err I believe 'Sen-sai' was the correct term."

"Actually 'Sensei' is the proper term." Minako corrected. "But it's good to see you're putting those books on Japanese culture that Narukami gave you to good use."

…

It had taken mere minutes for the Ancient Starship to rise out of the sands of Nessa's desert, and soon after Yu and Minako found themselves en route to the ice world known as Himuro (which this loop's natives insisted was the sixth planet of the system, despite it clearly being a moon orbiting Meido). It would be there that the group would find a method of breaking

through Meido's Krawl covered skies, and also where they could find information about a powerful artifact known as a Geo.

While Aldous was practicing summoning his Persona in the cargo hold, Yu and Minako were busy flying the ship.

Meanwhile Izanagi and Pharos were fighting a losing battle against boredom.

===Surface of Himuro, Three Days Later (Kollin Standard Time)===

"So you want to come with us?" Yu asked.

"It took awhile, but I'm finally able to summon my Persona in a controlled environment." Aldous declared proudly. "All that's left is to attempt it under combat conditions."

"So how does it feel?" Pharos asked curiously.

"I'm not quite sure." Aldous replied. "The best way to put it is that I feel 'more complete' I suppose, even though I've only had this power for a short time it's hard to imagine going back to a life without it."

"I think the more important question is: who answered your call?" Izanagi interjected.

"You'll know soon enough." Aldous quipped.

...

"Thou art I...and I am thou..."

"From the sea of thine soul I have come..."

"I am Epimetheus, he who was gifted hindsight."

And with that Aldous' Persona let out a Maragion to fry all the nearby Krawl to a crisp.

...

"I think we have a successful field test." Minako declared. "I wish Orpheus was that strong when I first got him."

"He probably developed a social link with us before summoning it without realizing." Narukami guessed. "Most non-Amala loopers aren't as sensitive to shifts in social relationships as we are; hell, even other Amala loopers aren't as sensitive to it as we are."

"True," Minako conceded, "he probably doesn't get the sudden voice from nowhere informing him when he gets closer to people. It's going to be a pain determining how much power he'll get from fusions."

"Both of you should get your heads examined if you're hearing voices." Aldous said with no small amount of concern for his comrades.

"Don't worry," Pharos reassured him, "Igor says they're fine."

Aldous let out a sigh of relief, "Let's split up then, half of us will go fix one generator, the rest will fix the other." He suggested. "I'll head for the main control room, contact me when you've restored power to your area."

===Alignment Control Room, Himuro===

The first thing Aldous did when he reached the control room was walk over to the main console and pick up the Data Crystal containing the Geo locations resting on it. Next he called up the two generator teams.

"I have the crystal," he stated, "so at least we have a backup plan if this harebrained scheme of yours doesn't work."

"Good timing," Minako commented, "Pharos and I have our generator running."

"Don't worry Aldous, it'll work," Narukami said reassuringly, "my generator's running too, so all you need to do is line this ball of ice up so the light can cut a path through the Krawl."

"Ok, everyone hold on I'm beginning the rotation now." Aldous informed everyone via comm-link as the planet began to shake violently. "It's done, our firing line is clear."

"I'll head back now," Minako informed everyone, "I should have the miniature Mass Relay installed on the Ancient Starship when you all get back."

===Orbit over Meido===

"Hey Arisato."

"Yes Narukami?"

"How many Omnipotent Orbs does it take to destroy a planet?" Yu asked slyly.

"One at sufficient velocity." Minako replied with a grin.

"I've run the math and all conclusions point to one thing." Izanagi interjected. "This is going to be awesome."

"Can I push the button?" Pharos asked enthusiastically.

"How can I say no to face like that?" Aldous replied with a chuckle.

Pharos merely smiled as he pushed the newly installed "Big Red Button of Doom".

…

It took less than a millisecond for the miniature Mass Relay to warm up.

The Omnipotent Orb was fired half a second later.

In less than three seconds the Orb impacted Meido's surface, causing the planet to explode into an asteroid field in a flash of light.

…

"We are going to be in so much trouble for that." Aldous commented. "But it was still totally worth it."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – part 22 (START OF ARC 2)
Author: Tincanman125

It had been two years since the defeat of the Krawl swarm and the destruction of Meido, but the group was not idle for long.

In the months following the incident the team hunted down the Geos, each one having been named after an Arcana; though only the Sun Geo found on Genshi was active and was currently being studied by the NPP.

Professor Kate had a mild panic attack upon hearing of Meido's destruction, though thankfully she quickly recovered. She currently spends her time researching the Ancient Starship in one of Kollin's many Orbital Service Bays.

Doctor Wright, being the leading authority on fossils, and the no longer extinct creatures that had come from them by proxy, was hired by the NPP and moved to the "Persona Research Lab" on Kollin.

With Dr. Wright's departure, Digg was placed in charge of the research lab on Genshi.

Cyrus continued to be an informant for the NPP, and in his own words is "filthy stinkin' rich."

As it could no longer orbit Meido, Himuro fell into an orbit around the local star; thus it had truly become the sixth planet of the Nanairo system.

Aldous received a new Prizmod, bringing him up to full combat effectiveness, and assists Dr. Wright in his research.

Izanagi and Pharos, bored in peacetime, are currently "on loan" to Aldous and Dr. Wright.

Minako and Yu are currently on probation for the destruction of a planet.

Igor faked his own death to escape his cult, his replacement Commander Grant is aware of Igor's survival, and still reports directly to him.

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Mass Effect]
Sovereign's New Groove – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

"Wait a sec." Before Shepard could press the panel to open the airlock, he felt his hand pushed down by biotic force.

He turned to glare at Pixie. She didn't seem too perturbed by this, and continued.

"What happened to that bird gu-sorry, *turian* that was supposed to be with you?" she asked, circling Shepard in a lazy circle of flight. "Flynn said he was here to see if you could make the cut for the GHOSTS. SPECTRES. Whatever they're called."

"She...raises a valid point," Flynn said, backing away from the door and glancing around the corridors of the Normandy. "Where *is* Nihlus?"

"..*damnit*," Shepard swore, rolling his eyes. "He tried to keep me in the sickbay when I gave him a sit-rep. I had to knock him out and stuff him somewhere out of the way."

"I'd argue against that," Langdon chimed in, pacing over to the Mako in the cargo bay, "but he'd probably just end up being extra baggage. Like bringing a civvie on a SEAL team mission."

"Where'd you put this guy, again?" Naoki asked, leaning on the tank.

"I...wait, it was *inside*-"

Langdon keyed in his access codes, and the door swung open; a disgruntled turian took the time to fall out of the tank, moaning slightly.

"...the Mako," Shepard finished. "Should've kept better track of that. The fact that the *universe is about to die* was a bit more important," he quickly justified, as some of his comerades moved to chastise him for being so forgetfull in such a vital mission.

"Wh-*Shepard!"* Mandibles flaring in rage, Nihlus sprung up from his prone position and reached for his sidearm. Finding it missing, he made the turian equivalent of a scowl. "What the hell are-*stand down!* That's an order!"

"That...won't be necessary, Nihlus." Stepping forwards, Flynn placed what he intended to be a comforting hand on the other Spectre's shoulder.

And was promptly punched square in the face for his trouble.

Nihlus noticed *who* this was a few seconds *after* the reflexive blow. He blinked in confusion. "Frinn? What are you doing here?"

"Aiding Shepard in stopping some very dangerous demons from tearing reality apart at the seams," Flynn nodded, ignoring the now throbbing pain between his eyes and the drops of blue blood trickling down from his nose.

"...Wait...you're here to..." Nihlus tried to keep his body language neutral, but Shepard could tell from spending lifetimes with Garrus that he was about to have a panic attack of some kind. "Don't tell me that nonsense Shepard spouted about time and that Tree was..."

"All of it true. Give the man a prize," Naoki cut in. "Look, we're *really* short on time, and I'm itching to do *something* other than trudge through the Vortex World over and over, so just *go with it*."

Nihlus glared at the krogan. He took several deep breaths to steady himself. "What...exactly are you going to do?"

"Hunt down the anthropomorphic personifications of organic despair, slay them, and convince a giant robotic cuttlefish not to take his own life and the world with it," Isabeau replied, her voice clipped and annoyed.

Nihlus just stared at her.

"We live in a world where all the creatures of myth and legend we've read as kids exist in the flesh," Langdon exclaimed, exasperation clear in his voice. "Our friend there," (Naoki smirked and waved his three-fingered hand mockingly) "is a living weapon created by the incarnation of chaos and entropy. *You* helped fight off a hanar Enkindler from exterminating all life on the Citadel with a *magic spell* just *last year,* according to the news! And we've got about a dozen demons *made of death* sitting in our cell phones, ready to beat up a Reaper with a violin and a trumpet! I *think* we at least deserve the *benefit of the doubt!"*

The Council Agent was silent for a few seconds as he processed all of this. Biting back questions like "what's a cell phone?" and "I *thought* the Council had that incident with the angel classified?", he glanced at the motley crew Shepard had assembled in the scant few hours he was knocked out, and slowly nodded. "Fine."

"Alright," Shepard said, already stepping past Nihlus and making his first step into the Mako. "Don't worry too much: if the universe doesn't implode in the next few hours, then-"

Nihlus quickly stepped back into the tank he has been locked up in, bumping into Shepard hard. The Commander grunted, flopping down into his seat.

"I'm coming with you," Nihlus said firmly. "The storage capacity was upgraded to hold demons, so we should all be able to come."

"You...do realize that you're going to be *way* out of your depth, right?" Landgon asked, even as he followed the turian into the tank and sat down on one of the passenger's seats.

"If what you're saying is true, every life..every organic that's *ever lived* is going to be wiped out if you fail." Nihlus buckled himself in. "I'm a Spectre. The best of the best. I can't sit back and let the galaxy fall apart without *trying* to stop it."

"Your funeral," Naoki replied, squeezing through the narrow hatch and taking his own seat.

"Naooooki, you're being too negative!" Pixie said teasingly, moving to playfully bop Naoki on the nose. He batted her hand away, and she rolled her eyes. "I mean, this is just the White! You know, the guys Flynn and Isabeau have beaten dozens of times? What could-"

"NO!"

Squeaking, Pixie nearly toppled over from the surprise of half a dozen voices screaming at her at once. Flapping her wings quickly to regain her balance, she glanced around the room, bemused. "What? What'd I say!"

"Those words." Langdon muttered. "NEVER say those words."

"Oh...you mean 'what could possibly g-'"

She was cut off by a quick electric shock to the face from an aggrivated Shepard.

"Just...don't," he said. "We've got enough at risk already without jinxing it."

"You actually believe-"

"We went over this, dumbass," interjected Naoki, cutting Nihlus off. "Magic's a thing. It's *been* a thing for decades in this Loop. Get over it."

Miscellaneous 10

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 23 to 26
Author: Tincanman125

===Present day, NPP HQ, Kollin===

"I hear the two of you are finally off probation!" Aldous exclaimed with a huge grin on his face. "So I stopped by to drop off these." He said as he gave Yu and Minako their Prizmods back.

"It's good to see you again Aldous." Minako told him. "It's been what? A year?"

"One year and nine months to be exact." Yu corrected. "Are Izanagi and Pharos with you?"

"No, they're waiting for you in your new Patrol Cruiser." Aldous said. "I'm just here to say hello before I head off to help Kate in the service bay; but I can't seem to shake the feeling I'm forgetting something today."

"It probably isn't that important then." Minako mused. "It was nice seeing you."

"Likewise." Aldous stated. "I suppose I'll see you around then." He said as he left.

===Cargo Bay/Lab, Patrol Cruiser===

The bad news was that all of the team's combat capable Personas other than Lucifer, Messiah, Thanatos, and Izanagi-no-Okami, had been "requisitioned" (read: confiscated) by the NPP for research purposes, likely as a punishment to appease the members of the general populace that were still upset about Meido's destruction.

The good news was that the door the the Velvet Room had followed them to this ship.

"Well, at least we still have each other." Yu sighed.

"Well what are we waiting for?" Izanagi asked. "Going out to find some new fossils is the perfect excuse to take this baby out for a test drive!"

"While that is true, we're still on a tight leash." Pharos pointed out. "We are not allowed off the planet except on patrol, and ours doesn't start for the next half hour."

"On the bright side, as long as we don't leave the ship we're free to goof off however we want." Minako stated. "It'll be nice to have some R&R without another officer watching us."

"I'm going to go back up top and get reacquainted with the flight controls." Yu said.

"I'm gonna take a nap, wake me up if the Krawl attack." Minako joked.

"Like that'll happen," Izanagi said as he rolled his eyes, "there isn't a single Krawl left in the system."

===Orbital Service Bay, Kollin, 25 minutes later===

As the intruder alarm blared throughout the Ancient Starship Aldous had finally remembered what he had forgotten.

"Blast it!" He swore. "I forgot to warn them about the Krawl returning today!" He yelled to he bolted to the door. "I just hope there's time to warn them before-"

He was unable to finish his thought as a familiar hair-like tentacle wrapped around his waist and tossed him aside.

===Meanwhile, back at the Patrol Cruiser===

"Hey everyone, we've got a call from the Commander." Yu announced as he put the message on screen.

"We're under attack." Commander Grant stated grimly. "We have confirmed reports of Krawl all over the system, I'm mobilizing all our assets across the system, but I can't reach Aldous, your mission is to find him." Grant ordered.

"Understood." Yu responded.

"I want you to know that I'm thankful for your prior service," Grant said, "save him and the Starship, and I might be able to turn public opinion back in your favor. Grant out." The Commander said as he cut the transmission.

"It'll take too long to wait for Minako," Yu said, "Izanagi, you're my co-pilot, Pharos get below deck and wake her up." Narukami ordered.

"Got it!" Pharos said as he rushed to the elevator.

"I can't believe I jinxed it." Izanagi said as he sat down in the co-pilot's chair. "Why'd I have to open my big mouth?"

===Orbital Service Bay, Kollin===

Unfortunately, by the time the team had reached the Service Bay there was no trace of the Ancient Starship, and worse still, it seemed everyone was trapped on the upper level of the Service Bay by some black vortexes guarding the elevator on the lower floor.

"What the? Thanatos is acting strange," Minako said, highly confused by the Persona's behavior, "he's looking at those vortexes like they're armed explosives."

"Why are they green anyway?" Yu asked.

"Back at the lab Doctor Wright said the color of a vortex matches the property of the Krawl inside." Pharos explained. "He claims that other officers started to report these color changes

during the last days of he mop-up operation two years ago."

"I remember that too," Izanagi commented, "the green ones have the Aurora property."

"I guess that explains it." Yu said. "Messiah and Lucifer can deal with this, Minako and I will distract the little Krawl, Thanatos and Izanagi should fly up to the upper level and check for survivors." He suggested.

"Ok, then let's remind the Krawl why they shouldn't screw with us!" Minako shouted as she sliced one of the Krawl Dust in half with her sword.

...

Izanagi was a bit worried now, for starters Thanatos was still tense (and it was never a good sign when death was worried about something). Secondly, Kate had told him that Aldous had been *on* the ship when it disappeared. And third, now he had the feeling that something was watching him.

...It had him even more concerned that the feeling faded almost as soon as he noticed it, and more telling was the fact that Thanatos was visibly calmer in that instant; which suggested that if he *was* being watched, then whoever was observing him could either read minds or could tell when he sensed their presence.

...

"Something's wrong here," Minako said aloud, "I get that those Krawl theoretically had an advantage over Thanatos, but they were so weak that they probably couldn't even scratch him, so why was he so on edge?"

"Good point." Yu agreed. "But we don't really have time to think about it now, let's just finish up here and report back."

...

"It's like I told your... friends here," Kate said, "the Krawl came, attacked us, and stole the ship with Aldous on it."

"Can you remember anything else that might help us?" Yu asked.

"Well Hank, that's our head mechanic by the way, said he saw a Krawl that looked almost human," Kate told them," and he's been swearing up and down that she actually spoke, but frankly we aren't sure if we can believe him." Kate explained. "It's not that he isn't trustworthy, but he did take a nasty blow to the head during the attack." She amended.

"Well we'll include it in the report anyway, it doesn't hurt to be prepared after all." Minako stated.

===Patrol Cruiser, A Few Minutes Later===

"The loss of both Aldous and the Ancient Starship is unfortunate," Grant said over the commlink, "but at least you saved everyone else, and we know that there's a chance our enemy has some intelligence behind it, so I'm going to call this a tentative success."

"Any new developments?" Minako asked.

"The research team on Genshi have reported sightings of Krawl near an old tower they were studying and have reason to believe it may be a target." Grant informed them. "Digg asked for both of you by name in his request for help."

"Give the word and we'll head there right away." Yu said.

"Good, I've decided to deputize your friend Pharos, that way we can tell the public that we have an officer monitoring you at all times, it should give you more wiggle room to work with." Grant told them. "I also called to tell you that your informant wants to speak with you after you're done investigating. Grant out." He said as the comm clicked off.

"I get the feeling he has a much more personal stake in this than most people." Pharos mused.

===Research Lab, Genshi===

"I'm so glad you're here." Digg said with a sigh of relief. "The situation has changed drastically since I called for help."

"What exactly happened?" Minako asked.

"At first the Krawl seemed content to keep their distance, they were only watching us, and there were only a few, so it was unnerving but not dangerous." Digg explained. "Then a little while before you both arrived they chased us away from the tower and started guarding the only path to reach it. Thankfully no one was hurt."

"Don't worry Digg, we're here to clear them out." Yu reassured him.

"Just be careful," Digg warned them, "the Krawl had some sort of leader, and not only is it smart enough to speak; its appearance is unsettlingly humanoid."

"Think it's the same one that Kate's friend saw?" Izanagi asked Pharos.

"At this point that seems to be a safe bet." Pharos replied.

"Thanks for the warning Digg." Minako said.

"Before you go, we have some fossils in the crate behind you." Digg mentioned. "We were going to send them to Kollin, but they'd be more useful brought back and fighting Krawl, so please take as many as you need."

The team turned around to see a comically oversized crate, and silently wondered how they hadn't noticed it before.

"Where did all these come from?" Yu asked in a surprised manner.

"Genshi is almost as rich in fossils as Nessa is in minerals," Digg explained, "that's why Dr.Wright set up the lab here."

...

After awakening the fossils the team had a wide variety of options to choose from, and as they had been warned about the large number of Flash Krawl, Yu had decided to bring Sraosha and Izanagi-no-Okami. Meanwhile Minako brought Scathach and Titania, though Thanatos refused to be left behind and was following them.

"Any idea why Thanatos is being so clingy all the sudden?" Yu asked.

"None whatsoever." Minako dully replied as the group marched through the jungle with some solar panels Digg had loaned them. "I'd almost forgotten how hot it was here." She sighed.

Eventually they arrived at the path to the tower, and after getting rid of the Krawl blocking it, aligned the solar panels to focus sunlight on the wall of shadows cutting off the path, causing it to disperse.

With the path unbarred the team had a relatively clear route to the tower, and with any luck they'd be able to beat a few answers out of the talking Krawl that was most likely waiting there.

===Tower, Genshi===

"I was wondering when you brats would show up." The Krawl sitting on a rock next to the tower said. "I still have to pay you both back for ruining my plan and making me look like a fool two years ago."

"Do we know you from somewhere?" Pharos asked.

"Not personally no," the Krawl said, "my name is Jado; I'm one of the four High Krawl serving Master Krux, and mastermind of the invasion from two years ago."

"So you're a Vilokken agent then?" Yu asked.

Jado scoffed, "I'm as much a Vilokken as you are a monkey." The High Krawl stated. "Vilokken are mindless beasts we send out to crush the pathetic attempts at 'resistance' that the locals put up, after all, why dirty our boots crushing bugs when we have a flyswatter laying around?"

"We don't have time to waste on you," Minako said, "Kate identified the Krawl leading the attack on Kollin as a 'she', so if you have a point you should get to it quick, otherwise we might as well kill you now."

"Big mistake," Jado growled, "until now I was just annoyed, but now I'm pissed!" He shouted as he smashed the tower to rubble. "Now you die! Get them Shadow!"

At that point a dark figure with glowing white eyes rose up from the ground behind the group and lunged at them, only barely being intercepted by Thanatos.

Meanwhile Jado had taken the opportunity to change into his true form during the distraction his 'Shadow' had created.

Jado's true form vaguely resembled a gnarled tree with black and blue stripes on its body, and his face consisted of one vertical oval around where his forehead had been, and two horizontal oval shaped eyes just beneath it.

Jado quickly fired three orbs of energy at the group, one of which had hit and taken out Titania despite the Persona's resistance to Jado's Flash based attacks, the second scored a direct hit on Thanatos, causing him to lose his grip on Jado's Shadow, which sunk into the ground and vanished, and the third caught the edge of Izanagi-no-Okami's weapon; ripping it out of his hands and sending it flying.

As soon as the weapon hit the ground Shadow materialized under it, and after grabbing the handle its massive jaws, it sped off to Jado's side.

To say Izanagi was upset was a huge understatement, he had reached a level rage which he hadn't known since his mind had first developed; in fact his anger was so powerful and had come about suddenly enough without Yu expecting it, that it caused enough stress on Narukami's psyche for Sraosha to demanifest itself.

In short, Izanagi *had gone completely bats**t insane with rage*.

To put it in simple terms, the reason Izanagi had formed a coherent mind in the first place was partially because his personality had been created based on Yu's perception of the Shinto deity of the same name, who he imagined had a strict code of honor; of course he was still Yu at his core, but basically, by disarming him, and taunting him by stealing his weapon to top it off, Izanagi reacted how Yu believed an angry Shinto deity with a massive ego would: with blind rage.

That rage had just barely been enough to bring Izanagi's demonic nature to the surface, and the demon was lashing out in Jado's general direction with everything it had, from the typical repertoire of Agidyne, Bufudyne, Garudyne, Ziodyne, and Megidolaon, to more primitive attacks like throwing large rocks.

Needless to say neither Jado's Shadow nor the cliff behind it survived, and after atomizing a few trees and inflicting massive (but not lethal surprisingly) damage on Jado himself, Yu had finally managed to suppress Izanagi's demonic side before passing out, causing Izanagi and the weapon he'd been throwing a fit over to return to the sea of his soul.

…

"WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?" Jado shouted.

"Let's just say he has... issues and leave it at that." Minako said as she walked over to a downed Jado.

The last thing Jado saw was Minako's blaster barrel leveled at his face before his world ended in a flash of green.

[Devil Survivor 2]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Saiduq looked down at the city as the Loop began again, already planning to take care of Polaris again when new memories hit him. He actually stumbled due to the absurdity of the memories, not having been prepared for them.

"...Well, I'm sure the Shining One will be thrilled for this."

…

In the JP's base in Osaka there were seven people inside the meeting room, all gathered for a single reason.

"Oh my god, this is my new favorite Loop now. Forget everything else, this is the single best one."

Daichi had never seen Hibiki so excited for anything like this before, so it was no surprise that he was a bit creeped out. "Yes, because being Sentai knockoffs is the greatest thing ever."

Indeed, for this Loop the *Divine Star* Canopus had need of seven people to take up the powers of the Septentrions to defend Tokyo from the demon forces of Belberith the Raging Lightning God. Those seven happened to be Hibiki having Alioth's powers, Io with Phecda's, himself with Dubhe's, Makoto having Merak's, Keita and Mizar, Airi and Megrez, and Yamato with Benetnacsh's power. It would suffice it to say that their reactions to dressing up as Sentai heroes were varied.

Io looked over her costume, rather nervous to wear it. "It doesn't really… leave much to the imagination, does it?"

Keita huffed. "So long as it disguises us it should be alright. Let's just hurry up so we can go kick some ass."

"Speak for yourself, won't this get in the way of school?" Airi still had classes, and was worried that this would hurt her grades.

Makoto was off to the side with Yamat, having their own discussion. "Chief Hotsuin, do I really need to do this? It just seems rather juvenile." She was the oldest one of the group here, so she felt rather out of place.

"It was either you or Fumi and I don't trust her enough to not dissect one of us or herself to figure this out. Besides, if I have to do this then you do to. That is an order." He was damned if he was going through this farce of a Loop without someone else being uncomfortable.

"Y-yes sir."

A siren suddenly went off as the computer screens detected a demon emerging in Nagoya. They were all quickly getting prepared to go face it as Hibiki said, "This is going to be

good!”

…

As the demon Jaki Wendigo rampaged through the streets of Nagoya, it spotted a man exiting a nearby hospital and focused on him. The man looked at his approaching doom with a cool but nervous gaze. “Well this was a good time to visit my girlfriend, wasn’t it. Can’t let it get in, though. So come on Ugly, try and get me!”

He led the angry demon away from the hospital down a few blocks before he tripped a gap in the sidewalk caused by the demon’s earlier bender through town. “Well damn. Guess this the end of ol’ Joe,” he muttered as the Wendigo loomed over him.

“NOT TODAY!!!”

A sudden punch knocked the demon quite a good distance away from the downed man, as he looked at the figure. “Dude, are you wearing Sentai cosplay?”

“No, good citizen, I am a hero sent to save the masses from demons like that one! Now get to a safe place while we deal with this monster!”

As Joe got to a safe place, the others caught up to him as they started to pose.

“WE ARE THE SEVEN STARS! NOW PREPARE TO FACE MAGICAL JUSTICE!!!” Hibiki yelled, becoming too engrossed with this to stop now.

Daichi turned to Yamato and said, “We never speak of this again.”

“Agreed.”

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – parts 27 and 28
Author: Tincanman125

Minako had just sent back Scathach with an unconscious Yu, and was about to head back to the ship herself when she heard a voice from behind her.

"That was ruthless," the feminine voice said, "I approve."

At that point Minako spun around with her blaster at the ready, only to be greeted by the sight of a woman in purple sitting on the ruins of the tower slowly applauding her.

"My name is Maja, and I'm the High Krawl you've been looking for." The 'woman' told her. "You might want to get comfortable, we have a lot to talk about."

===The Patrol Cruiser, Some Time Later===

Minako's conversation with Maja had been both enlightening and disturbing.

It seemed that Maja had been watching them since they first found Aldous two years ago, she had also been responsible for Thanatos' fossil being discovered on Genshi, and had been able to see and hear everything he did until Thanatos reached his final form, an act which weakend the connection.

That meant she knew about both Yggdrasil and the Loops.

Maja had also claimed that her presence had been the reason for Thanatos' recent odd behavior, though her link to the Persona was barely there, it still existed on some level, thus making the death god nervous when she was present.

The only good thing about the meeting was that Minako had confirmation that Aldous was still alive, but Maja promised to return to them with 'an offer' sometime later.

In all honesty, a calm Maja was almost as scary as an angry Mitsuru.

Minako had explained everything to Yu when he awoke, unfortunately Izanagi going berserk meant he'd have to spend some time with Igor before he could pull the Persona out of the sea of his soul safely again, meaning that Minako would likely be on her own for her mission on Nessa.

This was going to suck.

===Colony, Nessa===

"It's just you this time?" Cyrus asked. "Where's your friend?"

"My partner was injured in the line of duty." Minako told him, it was close enough to the truth anyway.

"That's a real shame," Cyrus said in a surprisingly disappointed tone, "I was starting to like him, maybe I'll send him a get-well card."

"As much as I'm sure he'd appreciate that, we're getting off topic," Minako stated, "You said you had information?"

"Yeah, my workers have seen Krawl hanging around an old stone tower in a place called Mineral Valley on the other side of the planet." Cyrus explained. "They say the Krawl there turn the sand into glass in a trail behind them, and that something big, mean, and red is leading them; I'd thought you'd want to know."

"I have to say, that's some pretty good intel." Minako replied. "Color me impressed."

"I may be greedy," Cyrus said with a grin, "but when someone pays me to do a job, the client always gets their money's worth."

===Mineral Valley, Nessa===

Minako wasn't taking any chances this time, she decided to bring Byakko and Thanatos with her, both them being her most powerful Flash Personas at the moment, and she also brought

Messiah, Cybele, Kohryu, and Satan as backup, if they couldn't stop what she was up against, then she had her 'instant win button' in the form of The Universe, though she'd really rather not break the local space-time continuum to win, she didn't want Maja to find out about all of her tricks; there was always a chance she could develop a counter, and though that chance was practically non-existent, non-loopers had pulled it off every once in a blue moon.

Maybe she was being paranoid, but who could blame her? She did just learn that her unAwake enemy had used her own Persona, and a few other methods, to spy on her for the past two years after all.

[Devil Survivor 1], [Fate/stay night]
Servant Summoning Program (title assigned by compiler) – part 1
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Shirou had Woken up kind of early this Loop. Sakura was also Awake, seeing as Shinji had a complete attitude adjustment. A not as important note was that it seemed to be the year 2014.

He was a first year student this time around, which meant the War wouldn't happen for a while. If at all. This time around the Fuyuki Grail War had a decisive end, ending the existence of the corrupted Grail. To celebrate, Kiritsugu had an acquaintance go and rescue Ilya and her two maids from the Einzbern family (he honestly suspected it was Lupin) and they managed to have a happy life until the elder Emiya's death.

Taiga had done her best to help around this time around, and had recently given the three of them right-off-the-production-line smartphones (probably with Raiga Fujimura's help) earlier this month. He had just the faintest idea how to operate it, not being familiar with the model, but funny enough, Ilya had become an expert at using it and similar technology. He suspected it was only to get one up over an Unawake Rin, though.

As he headed to the school he saw Sakura walking to him, with a hint of worry on her face.

"Hey, Sakura. Is there something wrong?"

"Well, I found this strange app on my phone and I can't seem to find out anything about it. Did the same thing happen to your phone?"

A quick check revealed that there was indeed a new app on his smartphone, labeled 'DSP'. Messing with it he found that he couldn't open it or remove the strange app. "If it's on our phones, then it's probably on Ilya's as well. We'll have to check this out after school."

Parting to reach their respective schools, Shirou made it to the gate when he saw his sister over with Rin. A new thing to this Loop was that Ilya had decided to enroll at his school as a second year, her excuse for her height and childish looks was an advanced state of pygmyism from her mother's side of the family. He knew the real reason for her being here was to troll Rin.

Getting closer, he could hear Rin whisper with a hiss, "A proper magus shouldn't be fooling around with technology anyway, so any point you make now is rendered moot!"

“Oh Rin, that is such an old-fashioned way of thinking. If we can’t get with the times then we might as well be progressing backwards. Is that what you want? Backwards magecraft?”

“Why you little-” Rin’s retort was cut off as the school bell rang. “Aw dammit!” Not even bothering to keep up her School Idol image, she rushed to her homeroom.

“Is any of that really necessary?”

“Maybe not, but it’s rather fun acting my proper age.” He doubted that. “Anyway, after school we need to talk about something, alright?”

Nodding in response, he left for his own homeroom, barely making it without being late.

…

After school, the two step-siblings met Sakura on the way home, discussing the new app.

“I’ve been fiddling with it the whole time at school, but I can’t make heads or tails of it.” Ilya had deleting it, passwords, everything to her knowledge. Nothing worked.

Shirou asked her, “Do you have any idea what ‘DPS’ stands for?”

“Don’t know, it could stand for ‘Doggy Pooper Scooper’ for all we know.”

“That’s gross.”

Further down the street they noticed that a purple-tinted haze was rising from a few blocks in front of them,and the people rushing by, screaming to get out of there.

“Senpai, what’s going on?”

A bestial roar was Sakura’s answer, followed by a wave of green light washing over the three. They could see a figure stalking out of the haze, revealing itself to be a giant dog-like creature with two heads with trails of fire leaking out of one head mouth and a frosty mist pouring out the other.

“The hell!? Is that a monster?”

“Nevermind that, just get ready to fight it!”

But when they tried to activate their magic circuits, they found that they couldn’t draw anything from them.

“Senpai, I think that light may have blocked our magecraft!”

Before any other thought could be spoken, their phone beat them to the punch.

<BEAST_ORTHRUS_DETECTED/
UNLOCKING_DEMON_SUMMONING_PROGRAM>

“What?” At least they found out what DPS stood for.

Shirou's phone unleashed a bright light as it continued, stopping the approaching demon in its tracks.

<ACTIVATE/ SUMMONING_FAMED_KING_ARTORIA>

At that the demon sprung towards them before a golden sword Shirou recognized blocked its attack and flung it back down the street. He saw a figure's back in front of him, clad in a rich crimson cape fit for royalty, and the figure's features as she turned towards him confirmed just who had jumped out of his phone.

"Saber, is that you?"

Chuckling, King Artoria Pendragon of the Famed demon race replied, "Why Shirou, do you happen to know of any other King of Knights, I wonder?"

"Er, I-I had only meant-"

"Yes Shirou. It is me, and I am fully Awake.

"Hey, will you two knock it off! That thing's coming back!"

As Ilya said, the Beast Orthrus was back on its feet, ready to tear apart the one in its way.

Nodding to his new summon, Shirou said, "Alright, let's go!"

PeAcefUL dAYs haVe DieD,

LeTs SurVivE…

[Persona Q]
(no title)
Author: Tincanman125

"Hey Zen, can I ask you something?" Minato asked.

"Of course," Zen replied, "what do you wish to discuss?"

"Well you told us that both you and the 'Clockwork God' we fought in the rift were part of Chronos." Minato said. "So which one of you is the original? Did you make him, or did he make you?"

"Does it matter?" Zen asked in turn. "I exist, and now he does not. For all intents and purposes I may as well have been the original."

"So, you just don't care then?" Minato asked.

"Correct." Zen stated bluntly.

[Devil Survivor 1], [Fate/stay night]
Servant Summoning Program – part 2
Author: Alternis_Alcor

As Artoria clashed with the Beast demon, Shirou noticed two more shapes emerge from the haze. One was a hunched human shaped figure, with a curved horn sticking out of its forehead. It was clad in a tattered blue cloak and carried a large iron club. The other a mass of flames in the shape of a man. Fearing that Shirou's summon would become overwhelmed, Sakura looked at her own phone as it spoke.

<BRUTE ONI DETECTED/ SPIRIT INFERNO DETECTED/ SUMMONING FEMME MEDUSA>

In a bright flash, the legendary gorgon appeared in front of the fire demon. Her skin was pale from the waist up, her body clad in an iron chest piece. On her head was a mixture of light pink hair and iron chains shaped like snakes, or they were actual iron snakes considering the way they moved. Her eyes were covered by a blindfold adorned by a rune. From the waist down was a long serpentine tail that was covered in flexible chain mail and armor on top.

"Do not worry, Master. This demon will not harm you." And with that she rushed at the burning mass, her body covered with ice magic.

Ilya's own phone activated and began to speak.

<SUMMONING DEITY HERACLES>

And like the others before him, a giant of a man with bronzed skin stood tall before the three kids. He was the very definition of strength. A mane of wild dark hair framed his face as he glared at the oni who sought to harm his little master.

Without a word the Greek hero dashed forward and struck the Japanese ogre with a hard tackle, driving it farther back.

The three teens watched as their new summons completely wreck the attacking demons. Shirou summed up what they were all feeling.

"Technology is awesome."

…

"What the hell is going on!?" Rin hissed from her hiding spot.

She had noticed the two Emiya siblings acting odd at school, and decided that she needed to investigate as the Second Owner of Fuyuki City. They could be plotting some convoluted scheme involving magecraft for all she knew. It was a legit reason to snoop- to investigate.

Trailing them she found that they had met up with her sister, who was good friends with them for some reason. After that, though, they just started talking about those cell phone things.

Seriously, those two called themselves magi, yet they fiddle with those stupid little things. She couldn't figure out how they got Sakura roped into their little group.

Then some freaky magic fog leaked out from the' street and a Phantasmal Beast showed up! Then Emiya over there summoned a SERVANT from his PHONE! She was pretty sure that phones didn't work like that. To top it all of, the other two did the same thing and summoned another beast and another Servant!

She couldn't figure out what the hell just happened. Are they using mystic codes, or-

That had to be it. The Emiyas had gained a new magecraft, and then they taught it to Sakura. She then thought of how to get them to teach it to her. It was obvious that she would also be able to learn it if her sister could. As she was schem-plo-**thinking**, she saw that the beat down was over.

…

As Medusa finished shattering the Inferno-turned-stone statue, the three demon summoners could see that the strange haze had dissipated and was no longer a danger. Artoria had slain the Orthrus just seconds ago, and Heracles… had basically made the Oni his apprentice in the ways of Greek wrestling.

"I honestly don't know how that managed to happen." Ilya was confused, but she wasn't going to question it. But hey, she just got a new demon contract.

Sakura was focused on another matter. "How do we hide them? We can't just let them be seen."

"We can always say that we're just really good cosplayers." Medusa suggested. Artoria looked down at her armor and nodded, she herself wouldn't look out of place at one of those Renaissance fairs.

"Yeah, no. The 'DSP' app says here that it can dismiss you until we need you again. We'll call you back out later so we can figure this mess out," Shirou had been checking his phone for anything new when he found a manual for the app on the menu.

After dismissing the newly summoned demons (and new Oni) they prepared to leave when they heard someone behind them.

"And just where do you think you're going?"

Turning around, Shirou saw Rin with one of her scheming smiles on her face.

"Here I was just walking down the street when I saw you two calling up Phantasmal Beasts out in the middle of the street in broad daylight."

'She wouldn't,' Shirou tried to convince himself.

"As the Second Owner it *is* my duty to report you two, but I think I could be convinced to look the other way this one time."

‘Oh balls. At least she isn’t targeting Sakura.’

“So, care to try and convince me?”

Shirou and Ilya shared a glance with each other while Sakura looked in shock by this version of her sister. This one seemed much more devious than baseline Rin. The two step-siblings nodded, and proceeded with their plan.

“Trace on.”

Grabbing Sakura and pulling her into a bridal carry, Shirou Traced a pair of rocket skates on his feet. A benefit of the Loops was that he had enough practice Tracing things other than blades, though other things were trickier for him to craft. Ilya turned him around before jumping on his back, wrapping her arms around his neck to hold on.

The second he blasted off he started shouting behind him, “SORRY TOHSAKA I GOTTA GO OKAY BYEEE!!!”

Standing in shock, Rin took a few seconds before she shook her head and gave chase.

“HOLD IT RIGHT THERE EMIYA!!!”

As the teens ran down the street, they failed to notice a figure in orange robes hiding behind the corner.

…

Shirou had managed to reach the Emiya residence with Sakura and Ilya, but Rin had also managed to follow them the whole time. Before they could open the gate, all four teens noticed Taiga standing by it looking serious for a change.

“Shirou, there’s some people inside who want to speak with you and the others.”

Blinking, Shirou couldn’t think of who was looking for him right off the bat. “Uh… who are they?”

“Hookers.” Ah, she found out about his and Kiritsugu’s prank, then. Also the Association was here. Balls.

“You come in too Tohsaka, seeing as you are already here.”

“Oh, yes Fujimura-sensei.”

Shirou frowned, if his sister-figure was being this serious, then something big had come up.

Once they had all gone inside, Taiga led them to the dining table, where there were three people seated. Two were familiar to Shirou, being Waver Velvet and Bazett, but the last person was definitely new. He was young, with silver hair and a serious expression. He wore a black trench coat with emblems on it, one of with read as ‘JP’s’.

Rin was the first to speak after overcoming her shock. “Lord El-Melloi, sir! What are you doing here?”

The addressed man turned to her, “We are here because something has come up in Fuyuki City. Before I begin, let me introduce you to my associate, here.’

The stranger stood up from the table and said, “I am Yamato Hotsuin, the leader of a government group named JP’s.”

…

In the church, a person wearing an orange robe was on the phone speaking. When he finished the Father of the church, Kotomine, entered the room and asked, “So how was your little test run? Was it a success?”

The figure nodded. “Yes, we were able to bring a few demons into our world, but they were soon defeated. A minor setback, but soon we will be able to bring Lord Belberith to the city in time for the next War. Your cooperation is much appreciated, Father Kotomine.”

Kirei smirked, already preparing his plans in advance. “Of course, Kuzuryu-san. Of course.

[Nocturne], [Warhammer 40000]
D&D – Four-Chaos-Gods-Style – parts Uno, Uno-and-a-Half!, and Dos
Author: Lurks in the Dark

"And you'll need this one, and this one, and this one... Oooh! And all of these!" Naoki quickly found himself balancing a tower of tomes more than three times his height, and Tzeentch was still adding to the stack. Naoki had Awoke in the Grim Dark future and immediately set off for the Eye of Terror to meet up with Slaanesh, only to shanghaied by Tzeentch and find himself in the god's fabled Hidden Library, where, unsurprisingly, Tzeentch had been adding all the books and other forms of information from Yggdrasil as he could get his claws on.

"Listen," Naoki said, rolling his eyes, "while I might not be a devout fan of it, I *know* that you have to choose one edition and go with it. It's impossible to play all of them at the same time."

Tzeentch turned and stared at Visiting demon, eyes beyond counting blinking in befuddlement. "*Yes*, *I* can..."

Kashima rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Of course..." he muttered. "Listen, for the sake of whatever we all have that's the closet thing left to sanity at this point, I'm going to be Dungeon Master," he asserted.

"But!"

"No! No 'but's!' Naoki said, putting the full weight of the power that let him punch out deities into his glare. He had found out upon arriving in the Eye of Terror that the Chaos Gods had

instituted a "Game Night" periodically whenever all four of them where Awake at the same time and they felt like it. "Slaanesh, much as a I adore hir, would turn the campaign into one giant orgy; Khorne would simply have the plot be a portal to the Hells opening and having us fight all the demonic armies of the setting, with Khorne himself somehow declaring himself lord at the end; Nurgle would be... I don't know... virus-ridden zombies or something.... and you, *you* would use DM privileges to change the rules on the fly, saying that it was 'all part of the plan' or some shit," Naoki summarized.

"If there's *any* chance of *not* having this idea turning into a total and complete cluster-fuck I'm going to have to grab you four numskulls by the proverbial bootstraps and drag you all kicking and screaming to victory."

•••

Naoki flipped another page of the module, a beach chair and umbrella set up in the pristine white sands around. For a while (the passage of time meant little to a Looper, and even less in the Warp) he had been staying in Slaanesh's corner of the Warp, and was currently set up in the domain of Indolency, the sound of angel choir and the gentle lapping of the sea filling his ears, but he casually disregard the eldritch temptation inherit in them and instead used it as any other beach in Yggdrasil.

"Yeah..." he began, his eyes scanning the sheer multitude of traps and pitfalls that this module had. It was like the pen-and-paper equivalent of the Amala dungeon--maybe even worse. "Are you four *sure* you want to tackle *this* dungeon as your first?" he asked, looking over to his side, where Slaanesh laid completely nude in a more or less feminine form, taking in the "sun."

"Mhmm," Slaneesh replied, sipping of time type of liquid that might have been blood or wine out of what was either an actual skill or a coconut carved to look very much like one. Either way, it had a colorful umbrella, which Naoki approved of. "Tzeentch said he had a plan--" Naoki snorted--"and Khorne said he'll simply crush the puny traps."

"Yeah... best of luck to him with that," Naoki commented, biting down on a piece of jerky one of the damned souls had brought him and chewing it viciously between his teeth. Nicely spiced and pleasantly smoked; he didn't know what *type* of meat it was, only that Slaanesh had told him that it wasn't human flesh, and he wasn't too picky. "What about Nurgle?"

"Nurgle doesn't really care all that much when it comes to Game Night," Slaanesh said, flipping over to sun hir back. "He's usually content to simply hang out."

"I can see that..." Naoki commented, distracted, his brows rising as he read the section of the module that had a hallway that changed a player's gender and alignment, and trying to pass through the trap again to reverse it simply teleported them *out* of the dungeon sans their equipment.

So, basically, everything and anything that existed in this dungeon wanted to kill whoever was in it, and he was responsible for making four overgrown eldritch entities who, more or less, acted like small children at times, come out of it alive without causing a Loop crash.

Shit....

Right. Sighing, Naoki stored the module in his Pocket. He had decided on using 3.5 edition--no matter *what* Tzeentch might bitch about--but he would tweak the Tomb of Horrors so that version was up to snuff, since the 3.5 edition had nothing on the original. Granted, it would take some time to familiarize himself with Dungeons & Dragons enough to reliably do so, but time was something he had.

"Okay," he said, pulling out the character sheets that Slaanesh and the other gods had given him, "let's review who you guys are going to take into this meat grinder," he said, spreading out the four before him.

Slaanesh got up, neither shi nor Naoki cared about hir complete nudity, especially after some of the places each other had been in and done to other....

"So, first off: there's no way in hell you four will survive without at least level 20 characters with some hefty gear--not being total novices to D&D--so I'll have to do something about that. Otherwise, I'm not too surprised by what I've gotten. Khorne wrote out a human male Berserker--big shock..." Naoki said, deadpan. "Only thing is, if he wants any chance in even doing any damage to Acererak he's going to need a Vorpal Sword+5..." he considered. Moving on, he turned his attenion to Tzeentch, "Appearantly outline that he wants to be an Archmage with a focus on Divination... There's *no* way he didn't game these stat rolls...." Noaki's palm met his face with the same power and force that he had obliterated *gods* with. "It's like they either didn't bother to *read* the damn rules, or didnt' *care*...." he groaned.

Slaanesh made a cooing noise, hir hands rubbing at his Naoki's shoulders as shi pressed her nude breasts tight to his back. "Tzeentch read *every* book or *every* edition, Khorne never even opened any of them," shi commented.

Naoki peeked out from between his fingers at Nurgles character sheet, such as it could be called that. "And Nurgle?" he asked, his voice muffled behind his hand.

"Nurgle just likes playing games with rest of us," Slaanesh said.

"I can tell..." Naoki said, looking down at Nurgle's sheet, which instead of having statistics filled in, it was blank, and a post-it note, stained with all manner of fluids, had the suprisingly neat writing of: "Whatever you think is best."

Followed by a fucking smiley face drawn in.

Naoki let out a sigh. "And then, there's you..." Naoki said.

"What *about* me?" Slaanesh breathed, proceeding to then bite one of Naoki's earlobes between her teeth.

"You want to be a succubus with either a sword or spear..." he said, not distracted by the Chaos God who was currently sucking on the side of his neck, over a pulse point.

"So I can *be* penetrated and still penetrate *other* people at the same time!" Slaanesh explained cheerfully.

"Yes, I know," Naoki said in a very unimpressed tone of voice. "Honestly, I'm surprised you didn't go with an elf, or better yet: a drow," he told her.

"Why?" Slaanesh said, coiling around him and gyrating hir hips in a very interesting manner.

"The Eldar made you, and they're, for all intents and purposes, space elves," Naoki said, causing Slaanesh to let out a giggle at his comparison. "Hell, a drow would be perfect for you, since you were birthed from their debauchery. Dark reflecton, and all that crap..."

"So, no succubus?" Slaanesh *Pouted*. The capital "P" was very much warranted in the expression.

"I *could* work up a succubus character for you," Naoki said, "but it would more or less be chewed up and spit out by the Tomb," he told her.

"I see," Slaanesh commented, moving to straddle her lover. "Well, whatever you think is best, then."

From that point on, there wasn't very much talk of Dungeon and Dragons.

•••

"Okay..." Naoki began began, sitting at the head of a large table with the module for Tomb of Horrors set out in front of him. "First, you'll find before you your revised character sheets that I modified for you so that you guys might have some hope to survive this thing....'

"You suggested it," Nurgle said, gazing down at his character sheet that listed that he was was a human bard.

"Yes... yes, I did," Naoki muttered to himself, ignoring Kashima's dark chuckle echoing in his mind. "I just didn't suspect that you guys would *agree* to it, but upon hindsight, I really should have," he grumbled. "Anyway, Khorne, I gave you a male human Barbarian, with a sub-class of Berserker. It kills things with sharp objects," he said simply.

"YES!" Khorned bellowed, the sound of dice rattling about in the skull gripped in his other hand. It was apparently his "lucky skull." "What is this Vorpal Sword+5?"

"You'll need that if you want to kill some of the enemies," Naoki said. "It's magical. It gives you a bonus to decapitation,"

"Skulls for the skull throne!" Khorne bellowed, gripping his character sheet in his hands.

"Thought you'd like that" Naoki said. "Moving on--Tzeentch, re-roll your character," he told the said god, who seemed to be favoring an avian form.

"Why?" Tzeentch demanded.

"Because I *know* you didn't roll between 18 and 20 for every stat," Naoki demanded. "You know what, here, Nurgle you do it for him," Naoki said, passing a cup with dice to the disease-ridden god, who did so without complaint.

"You cannot do this!"

"I just did," Naoki said, looking at the roll, which was *very* good--not impossible, but *highly* improbable. "I'm fairly certain you just did something to that roll--but you know what?--I don't *care*. Stop complaining," he demanded, filling in Tzeentch's sheet for him and passing it over to the sulking Warp deity. He turned his attention to Slaanesh. "You got any complaints?" he asked.

Slaanesh smiled at him, licking hir lips. "No, no..." she said airily, waving a hand. "I'm *good."* Shi was quite pleased with her female drow ranger and its bow and arrow--shi could penetrate other people from a *distance*!

"Lovely," Naoki commented. "And, no, you can't have sex with Animal Companion," he established, causing Slaanesh to pout. What good was her wolf, then?

"Okay, seeing as how you guys are... well, *you*," Naoki waved a hand at the gathered Ruinous Powers, "I'm going to bend the rules a bit and have you guys simply resurrect outside the dungeon when you die," he told them. "If only for the sake of my own sanity."

"Don't you mean '*if*" we did?" Nurgle asked.

"No."

"This shall be amusing!" Naoki heard Kashima gleefully cackle in his mind. Naoki did *not* agree.

...

After explaining to them what the ten-foot poles were really for--and that while, yes, Khorne *could,* in fact, use his pole to attack his enemies with, it was not the intended or recommended use of the instrument--the adventure had gotten under way with a minimum of difficulty.

"I found the entrance!" Khorne bellowed, waving an actual sword above his head.

"You begin to hear an ominous rumble," Naoki said.

"What fool dare to challenge the might of Khorne!" the Blood God yelled. "Is it a dragon? I will decapitate it and take its skull!"

"Ten," Naoki began to count slowly in the required seond-and-a-half increments.

"What is that counting for?" Nurgle wondered.

"The rumbling persists," Naoki said, immediately followed by, "nine... eight... seven..."

"I have no need to wait! Give me my foe now! I will kill them!"

Needless to say, Khorne was crushed beneath a giant slab of stone and lost his pole.

Khorne Death: 01

…

Tzeentch eventually found the real entrance to the Tomb before Khorne snapped the table in half, and Khorne proceeded to trigger two poison pitfall traps, leading to another death, and spikes, killing once more before all is said and done.

"Seems your 'lucky' skull, isn't," Slaanesh commented cattily, causing Khorne to attempt to throttle hir, only for Naoki to smack him back into place. Tzeentch had the foresight to check the area and noticed the mosiac path, but followed it and fell into a pit fall trap. Next time he cast a levitation spell and avoided that problem.

Khorne not so much.

Khorne Death Count: 03

Tzeentch Death Count: 01

…

"I shall handle the rest," Kashima suddenly spoke after--by what Naoki was quite certain was intervention from nothing short of their Admin or Yggdrasil itself--he had managed to get all four of Ruinous Powers into Tomb of Horrors.

"*What? Why!? No, go to hell!?*" Naoki shot back. Khorne was filled with manic glee as he sent his character after the gargoyle with the gem-studded collar. Nurgle ended up dying.

Nurgle Death Count: 01

…

"You open a door," Naoki rolled a die, "a spear materializes and impales you," Naoki said to Slaanesh, who grinned roguishly.

"If you want to impale me, darling, you don't have to use a spear," shi winked.

"You die," Naoki said. "How is Nurgle the one who's died the least out of all you?" he demanded. "No offense," he offered.

"None taken," the jovial grandfatherly god said, waving off the implied insult.

Tzeentch grumbled.

Slaanesh Death Count: 01

…

Tzeentch clicked his talons together, having discovered a trio of treasure chests behind not one, but *two*, secret doors.

"Yes..." he hissed. "I open the golden chest," he said.

"Poisonous asps leap from the chest and bite you." Naoki rolled his die. "You die."

Tzeentch growled.

Tzeentch Death Count: 02

…

"I cast 'Detect Magic' on the silver chest," Tzeentch said.

"You detect no magic," Naoki said, rubbing his temples.

"I open the chest!" Tzeentch demanded triumphantly.

"Poison darts fly out for d6 damage each. No saving throw."

Tzeentch Death Count: 03

…

"I open the wooden chest!" Tzeentch screamed.

Naoki raised a brow. "Are you sure about that?" he asked.

"It's the last one--it *has* to be the right chest!"

In his mind, Naoki heard Kashima snicker darkly. He shrugged shoulders.

"A towering magical skeletal appears in a flash of bright light; he has two swords. You are disoriented from the flash and the skeleton attacks you with both swords doing..." Naoki rolled his die, ...you die. Again," Kashima suddenly foced his way through, finishing the sentence with a smirk. Naoki forcibly wrestled back control, glaring darkly.

Tzeentch howled with anger, ranting at how he, the Weaver of Destinies, could be bested by a demilich!

"Yeah, Acererak is kind of a dick," Naoki commented.

"One wonders if he is an undead angel of some sort. His tricks are not unlike YHVH's plots," Kashima trew in his two cents, and Naoki wasn't inclined to argue the point.

"This is *bullshit*! I am TZEENTCH! I am the master schemer, not this stupid *skull!* I am *untouchable! **INVINCIBLE!***" the Chaos God raged, warp energy thrumming around him in his rage.

"Icarus had similar thoughts, and we all know what happened to him," Naoki said, making something on a piece of paper.

"**WHO THE FUCK IS ICARUS?!**"

Tzeentch Death Count: 04

…

"I pull them all down!" Khorne answered, taking a long drought from a nearby skull. Naoki would ask why he simply couldn't use regular drinking vessels like everyone else, but that would have been a stupid question.

"The floor opens up and you fall a hundred feet to your doom." Khorne bellowed; it was slightly amazing that his character sheet was still in once piece at this point. "Why are you so angry?" Naoki demanded. "You *know* you have to pull the levers up; Tzeentch figured that trap out already!" Oh, well. At least Naoki could counsel himself with the fact that none of them had been foolish enough to go into the gaping maw of the Face of the Great Green Devil--mostly because he had highly stressed, short of outright blatantly telling the Chaos Gods, that it would be a GOOD idea to stay the fuck away from that. Hadn't stopped Nurgle from losing his pole by sticking it into the mouth, though.

Khorne Death Count: 08

…

"I know you're doing this on purpose, and yes, I *do* recognize the extremely thinly veiled sexuado inuendo your suggesting to me. Later," Naoki said, looking over at Slaanesh, who smiled gleefully and clapped hir hands, not seeming to care that she had just impaled her ranger on one of the door-spear traps for the fifth time.

Slaanesh Death Count: 06

Khorne fell into the pitfalls at the entrance twice more.

Khorne Death Count: 12

Naoki sighed, cradling his head in his hands.

"Let me take my turn," Kashima chimed in eagerly, and Naoki could actually *feel* his demonic essence rub its hands together gleefully, despite not having any.

…

Amazing enough, Khorne actually seemed to have *finally* started checking for the pit traps and didn't die from them anymore. Naoki was honestly amazed. Then, he pulled the damn levels down. Again.

"You're doing this on purpose, aren't you?" he glared at Khorned, who howled and slammed his sword into the table in a fit of rage, impaling his own character sheet.

Khorne Death Count: 13

…

How were they dying so much! Naoki was deliberately fudging their rolls whenever they took the time observe their surroundings for clues or traps so that they succeeded! He knew they all read the rules (though he wasn't sure how much Khorne retained, honestly), and he was tempted to simply pull out a PS3, pop in God of War, and have the Blood God do that instead.

Nurgle was doing *really* well, actually, and had even found the start of the riddle near the entrance and was taking them to heart, leading to his low death count. Tzeentch, while playing cautiously, often tried to outwit the module and suffered the consequences of being a Munchkin by Acererak killing him with a trap. Tzeentch was still angry about returning to the Chamber of Three Chests and only finding a measly Ring of Magical Protection+1 for his troubles.

At this rate, Khorne was going to throw a tantrum and cause a the Loop to crash; Naoki decided to covertly ignore most of the traps and only punish him if he really *wasn't* trying.

He *really* didn't know how they doing this bad! This module could and has been completed by parties of lesser levels than what he had given the Chaos Gods--and he had only done that to given them a buffer of extra hit points.

"Slaanesh," Naoki commented, a thought occurring to him, "where's your wolf?"

"It died." Shi didn't seem overly distraught over that, so Naoki decided not comment or ask how the wolf had died. Probably fell in a fire pit or got turned to slime.

…

The hours seemed to blur together, one after another, as Naoki suffered through a completely new fresh Hell that was attempting to lead the Chaos Gods through the Tomb of Horrors. He didn't know and he didn't know when, but he *would* somehow get a hold of Gygax's soul and introduce him to torments so horrific that Yggdrasil itself would need to invent an entirely new language to describe them, primarily composed of screams of soul-rending agony and sanity-shattered gibbering.

This thing was worse than the Amala Labyrinth.

He felt Kashima fight for control once more, and at this point, Naoki simply couldn't bring himself to care. He didn't know why Kashima wanted to DM so badly, or why he had even told Naoki to suggest Tomb of Horrors in the first place, but you know what?

1. DID. NOT. GIVE. A. SINGLE. DAMN. ANYMORE.

"*Go nuts!"* Naoki told Kashima. "*You can deal with these four idiots,*" he said, and then proceeded to do the equivalent of taking a nap in his soul. "*Try not to crash the Loop, okay?*" Naoki didn't have much hopes of that, but he figured he should at least ask; Anchors of

Yggdrasil had responsibilities to uphold, after all, but there was only so much one man could take!

"The time for practice is long past. Now, you shall fight, or your shall die," Kashima declared, grinning in a feral manner at the Chaos Gods, his eyes turning red.

"Kashima!" Slaanesh cheered, and Kashima himself with a lap-full of Chaos God. "How have you been!" shi said, giving him a long kiss with more than a little tongue. Kashima grinned at hir and sent hir back to her seat despite the pout shi gave him. Tzeentch eyed him warily, but Nurgle simply waved in a good-natured manner.

"What are you doing here?" Tzeentch asked, quirking a brow inquisitively at him. "Where did Naoki go?"

"He grew tired of your foolishness and truly awe-inspiring acts of stupidity," Kashima told the Gods. "You deserve some sort of award for your *inspired* errors. He was doing everything short of holding your hands like children to guide you through the maze--and *still* you fell into obvious traps dozens of times" Kashima said. "It matters not, though, for you are all *my* test subjects now!"

"Test subjects?" Nurgle burbled; he supported this, being a scientist of sorts himself

"I plan to recreate this meat grinder as a boot camp of sorts for demons," Kashima told them. "I mean, granted, you are stronger than most of our Compendium combined, but if even you four stooges can claim victory over this simple skull, imagine what I could achieve with my own army!" he said, grinning wildly.

Slaanesh raised hir hand in the air. "Can I have a portion of of the Tomb?" shi asked, her eyes sparkling wickedly. "Filled with succubi and incubi and all sorts of fun toys?" shi asked, like a small child sitting upon Santa's lap at the mall.

Kashima winked at her. "As you wish" he agreed. "I needed a private chamber for Lust Squad, regardless. Their own weapons would distract everyone else, and nothing would get done."

Slaanesh shuddered in a manner that would have made a nun renounce her vows on the spot.

"Anyway, let's see where you are, then," Kashima said, looking down and then smiling in a manner that would have made Lucifer himself proud. "Ah. Khorne. you find yourself in a hallway of rose-coloured mist. What do you wish to do?"

"Khorne fears no mist!" Khorne replied.

"Good for you," Kashima commented. "You grow tits," Naoki suddenyl broke in, not willing to give up this golden opportunity.

All was silent around the table, and then all the gods broke into laughter, except Khorne.

"WHAT!" the enraged god bellowed.

"The mist flips your alignment and gender, and you are now a lawful good female berserker. Congratulations."

The table in front of Nurgle was now coated with a thick layer of mucus and pestilence from him laughing so hard.

Much to Khorne's credit and Kashima's shock, the Blood God didn't chop the table in half and instead decided to pass through the mists once again to reverse the effects. Good for him, thinking with his head like that, unfortunately....

"You teleport back outside the Tomb without any of your equipment or weapons," Kashima informed him, not even bothering to hide his glee.

The Loop crashed shortly thereafter, but Kashima felt he had gathered enough data to implement his training facility in the future.

Miscellaneous 11

[Devil Survivor 2]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

“Alright, I’ll bite. What the hell do you have around your neck?”

It was another Loop and it had started out alright; no demon attacks, no Septentriones attacking, no jerk-face Polaris. Daichi was looking forward to having a quiet week.

And then Hibiki came walking down the street with something odd hanging off his neck.

“Well, you remember when I told you about that one Loop I had before meeting our Admin, right?”

“Yeah, the one where we all died.”

“In that Loop, the Dragon Stream dragon-thing was named Shakko, and it gave me some of its power that Loop.”

“Alright, seems legit.” Daichi figured going along with this explanation would save him a headache.

“And I figured, if I could summon it during that Loop, why couldn’t I keep it? So the next time I went though that... experience again, I just kept it.”

The look of disbelief on Daichi's face was hilarious. “And so you decided to keep it as a pet!?”

The miniaturized Dragon Stream ‘dragon-thing’ in question was laying on Hibiki’s shoulders, its eyes moving independently from each other staring at everything.

“Dude, how does this seem like a good idea to you?” And there’s that headache.

“I’ve just been passing Shakko off as an odd snake, and so far it seems to be working.” Shakko had just snatched a person's lunch while the passerby was too busy talking on his phone to notice.

“W-whatever. Just don’t let Yamato find out, he might just flip if he sees this.”

…

“Er, t-that is a very interesting… snake you have there, Sir.”

“Why thank you, Agent Issei. Now, you had a report for me?”

The agent was no longer paying attention to his superior as it was all focused on the strange ‘snake’ that Chief Hotsuin had in his lap, one of its eyes focusing on him while the other was staring down the chief’s takoyaki.

“Stop staring at Shakko, you’ll make him feel self-conscious.”

[Persona 3]
(no title)
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Aigis Awoke.

Within her, numerous error message flashed across her CPU as her internal diagnostics still calibrated to Baseline detected a surge of new programming and directives spontaneously downloading themselves from what was assumed to be a remote wireless uplink.

Not entirely incorrect given the nature of Yggdrasil.

Quickly resolving the errors and going through her, by now, standard set of Loop protocols, Aigis searched her archival memory systems for recollections of any standard deviance in already established events and found none.

Nodding, Aigis sent out a Ping that went unanswered except for Igor, meaning that, barring the presence of a stealth looper, she was alone.

It was time to once again be reunited with him... or her, depending on Yggdrasil's whim.

…

Aigis stepped into the ever-ascending elevator that was her Velvet Room.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room," the smooth voice of its proprietor once more rang out, and the familiar line made a smile cross the android's lips. Even though he must have done so millions of times, Igor never failed to personally welcome each guest if he could, regardless of how many times they had been to this ephemeral place that existed between dream and reality.

"Hello, Igor," she greeted, taking the open seat across from the old man, who looked at her down the length of his rather long nose with his perpetually wide, bloodshot eyes. "Have you had any interesting new Guests since we last spoke?" she asked.

Igor's Cheshire grin widened, and he waved an immaculate glove hand in the air. "A few, my dear, a few," he said. "Are you hear to make use of my services?" he asked.

Aigis smiled at him. "Eventually," she said, then she reached into her Pocket and withdrew some tea leaves she had received from Iroh over in the Avatar branch, along with a silver tea kettle and two cups. "First, would you like some tea?" she offered. "I visited a branch where a Looper has used his Loops perfecting the art of creating the perfect tea," she informed him, making the water in the pot come to a rapid boil and proceeded to measure out the correct

amount of leaves and add them to the mixture. "He taught me what he knew of the art and gave me the gift of one of his newest tea mixtures."

Igor's smile turned less sinister and more kind, looking at the blonde-haired girl with fondness. "I'd be delighted to, my dear," he said, thanking Aigis as she poured him a cup. Aigis then put out a selection of Pinkie Pie's best confections between them. Igor selected a red velvet cupcake and she choose a strawberry tart. She didn't know how long she sat and traded stories with the master of the Velvet Room, but it didn't matter: time had even less meaning in this room than it did in the Loops normally. Two talked and traded stories, sampling foreign delicacies from other Loops, and enjoying themselves immensely--even if a bystander would not be able to tell so for Igor.

Daintily brushing crumbs off his gloves after he had popped the last bite of his second cupcake into his mouth, Igor fastidiously wiped his mouth with a cloth. "Those were delightful, my dear," he said in gratitude to his Guest, waving his hand and summoning forth the thick eldritch tome that housed the multitude of personae that she had collected. "But I believe you came here with a purpose, not to simply humor an old man like myself," Igor said with a grin.

Aigis giggled behind a hand. "Come now, Igor, you don't look a day over ten thousand," she said with a smile, making Igor chuckle slightly.

"You are far too kind to say so," he returned. "I assume you will want to do the usual?" he asked, already summoning the required persona that his Guest would need.

Aigis nodded, her expression turning serious as she ran over the steps she would take to manipulate matters to their desired outcome.

"You truly are an most amazing Guest," Igor suddenly said, causing Aigis to look at the proprietor of the Velvet Room with no small amount of surprise. Igor, as a rule, usually never commented or offered his opinion on those who entered the Velvet Room or their actions, so long as they held true to the contract that they had entered into.

"Every Loop you seek him out, without fail or hesitation," Igor said, waving a hand and summoning forth Aigis's desired personae and bestowing them to her, where they settled into her soul. "It matters not if he remembers you or not, nor do you care what form he may take, you are always by his side."

Aigis closed her eyes and smiled. It was true: every loop she sought out the boy to whom she had sworn to protect, who had become her purpose for living in Baseline and who had shown her what it truly meant to live life as a human being. Even now, what was centuries--perhaps even a millennium--later she still stood by his (or her) side, no matter what. There were times she was his lover, and she dearly cherished those loops, but other times she was his friend, or a sister, a mother. It did not matter: male or female; lover, friend, mother, sister--she would be by his side if possible. Yes, she could do whatever she pleased during her loop, but she was committed to the promise she had made as that blue-haired boy had died in her lap on that summer afternoon in Baseline, because it was he who had shown he what it meant to be a human and to have a heart.

"Quite astounding," Igor said. "That you, who were created should come to embody all the things that my master sees as good in humanity." Reaching forward, Igor took her hand in an affectionate gesture. "I am truly honored to have the privilege to serve you, my dear; you have exceeded even the wildest of hopes and dreams that myself and my master had for you." Igor patted her hand kindly, before once more bridging them beneath his nose, as he was wont to do. "Now I believe you have a young man waiting for--even if he does not know it yet," he said, revealing to Aigis that it was Minato in this Loop and not Minako (not it would have mattered, truly).

Her heart overflowing from the usually taciturn Igor's kind words, Aigis got up, bent over the table, and graced Igor's cheek with a brief fleeting kiss. Turning around, she walked out the door.

Igor watched her her leave for several seconds afterwards, wondering what wondrous things she would do with this Loop? It was only when he looked down to return the Compendium to its resting place that he saw a stack of items left on the table. Blinking, he reached forward and grabbed the top off the stack, and his smile grew.

There, piled high, was an impressive collection of vinyl records with exotic titles and even different languages from all across Yggdrasil. On top, was a note:

"To Igor,

The best Anchor we could ask for, who we do not appreciate as much or as often as we should.

Thank you for everything,

Aigis."

Smiling, Igor got up rose from his seat and a record player appeared nearby. Placing it on the player, a woman's soul song filled the room in words he couldn't understand but still seemed to convey her emotions with every syllable that echoed throughout the Velvet room. The label had written in Aigis's neat handwriting, "Ar Tonelico: Harmonious ~ Hymnos.

Smiling to himself, Igor felt a tear well up in his eye that had nothing to do with music or any sad tale he had heard on his telephone.

He was truly blessed to serve such wonderful Guests....

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Mass Effect]
Sovereign's New Groove – part 3
Author: Gamerex27

Fear is an instinct known to man since he first crawled out of the primordial muck and walked on land (or since he arose from clay, or evolved from primates, or was genetically engineered into existence by the protheans, depending on who you asked). It is a natural part

of any sentient being's very essence; a survival mechanism to ensure that they can flee from threats and live to fight and propagate another day.

Yet, like with most instincts, it can be trained out of the body. Fear is a reaction that can be surpressed and ignored. A brave being can lock away their fear: compartmentalize it so that they can bite back the fight-flight-or-freeze and accomplish whatever needs to be done in the face of terror.

But no matter how strong-willed a being is, there are some fears that cannot be surpressed or beaten into nothingness. Fear of darkness, for some. Fear of decay, aging, death, or even the fear of fear itself.

And, for those brave and tormented souls from the Sea of Amala, they shortly realized another fear they had not yet conquered.

"AAAAAHHHHHH!"

"SLOW DOWN, YOU MADMAN!"

Fear of speed.

Or, to be specific, the primal fear of all organics of Commander Shepard's driving.

"The fate of the galaxy's at stake," Shepard calmly explaned as he blazed across the ruins of Ilos at just under Mach 1. "We *can't* go slowly."

"COULD YOU AT LEAST DRIVE STRAIGHT?!" Lagndon roared as he buckled a third seatbelt across his waist. "WE'VE FLIPPED OVER ABOUT THREE TIMES NOW!"

WHUMP. THUD. VROOM.

"FOUR TIMES!"

"WHEEEEEE!" Pixie cheered, holding up her blue arms as if she were on a roller coaster. "This is fun! Makes me wish the theme parks still worked after the Conception!"

"We could just wait until Fused Loops for that," Naoki objected, the blood draining from his hands as he grabbed onto the roof's railing with a grip of iron. "We've got to get more of them *sometime*! It's *gotta* happen!"

"HOW ARE NEITHER OF YOU FAZED BY THIS?!" Flynn screamed, mentally having to stop himself from praying to God (given where he was from and all).

"His driving's *waaaay* worse," Pixie simply said, jabbing a finger at Naoki.

"Not *my* fault that the world keeps getting blown up before I can take a drivers liscence exam," the Demi-Fiend pointed out, teeth clenched. "Also, the gas keeps decaying about a week into the Loop in all of Tokyo. So I only got to drive once, and *that* was when we were trying to break through Noah's bullshit shields. I *had* to go fast to ram him! And that

was *one* time! And *slow the hell down already!" I'm a giant reptile-tank-Klingon...thing...and I'm about to hurl!*

"I just said we can't!"

"…Are we *there yet?*" Nihlus grumbled, the only one other than Shepard himself unfazed by all this.

"Don't make me turn this tank around."

Whatever screams or prayers to the Administrators coming next were cut off by a series of loud, squishy-sounding *thuds*.

"I thought Sovereign was too pre-occupied to bring in Husks and stuff?" Langdon asked.

"Demons are attracted to energy sources!" Isabeau shrieked over the whistling wind and increasingly more frequent death cries of crushed demons. "If they've turned on the Reactor, they are drawn to the power like moths to a torch!"

"So, we have even *less* time." Grinning in spite of the danger, Shepard stepped his foot down on the pedal. "Guess that means we need to go *even faster*!"

"*DAMN YOU, SHEPARD!*" Flynn howled, barely managing to supress his alien body's newly-discovered gag reflex. "*DAMN YOU!*"

…

The congress of Nazara was breaking down.

Millions of voices argued with one another at once, a cacophony that would have driven any individual organic insane trying to make sense of it all. Some rallied against the White ones, claiming that their plan went against their protocol in every way possible. Billions more drowned them out, screaming at their shell to work faster in attaching the cables of the Reactor to itself, to pour the limitless power of the Expanse into their form and lead the chorus to Ascension.

A small, but rapidly growing fragment of the chorus had simply broken down, and had ceased all function and crashed into a dormant state.

Sovereign was not human. Not organic. It did not-*could not*-accept that its mission was now impossible to fulfill. Faced with the unequivocable proof of such, however, its formerly-unified will fractured.

Where it became easy to drive the spikes into the unity and pull Their plans ever closer to fruition.

The White ones knew of the Loops, despite not being trapped in the neverending cycle themselves. All organics were slowly but surely being dragged into a whirlpool of despair and hopelessness-a cycle without end, even worse than what the Great Will's plans for humanity entailed.

What had once been Yggdrasil had become warped into Hel.

The four beings nodded to one another as they bound the Catalyst into the engine, where its soul would burn and produce the energy needed to end the suffering of the organics in this universe. Ignoring the cries of cycles and feeble protests, the perpetually-sobbing ringleader of the quartet crushed the sapience out of its being with a flick of its finger.

These Loops would never, *ever* end. There would be no escape.

These pitiful Loopers had yet to realize that all they strove for-all they ever did, will ever do-had no meaning whatsoever. Their stubborn cytoskeletons barred them into ignorance and baseless optimism.

The White would crush that optimism. In order for them to be saved from this cycle, they must be broken first. The only way to save all of Yggdrasil and fix the problems within was to shatter it into countless pieces. It was beyond saving. Everything was beyond saving.

All that could save everyone now, was oblivion.

[Nocturne], [Devil May Cry], [Warhammer 40000]
The Chaos Gods' Disco Rave
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Naoki had been looping a *long* time--insignificant compared to the Original Seven or some of the other Loopers, sure--but he had been through his Branch's baseline to realize that on top of arguably being one of most fucked up settings in Yggdrasil, it was also unusually resistant to variations. Hence, why the demon in question that something was *seriously* fucked up with this Loop; he had been so intrigued that he had decided to follow the script of Baseline, simply to see what was up. He had to say, though, as jaded as he had become, it was difficult not break down in hysterics upon exiting the hospital to see Dante staring up at the sky, his mouth agape and at a loss for words, something that the human-turned-demi-fiend-turned-demon knew that the smart mouthed and cocksure demon hunter rarely was.

Raising an eyebrow inquisitively, Naoki followed the crimson devil slayers line of sight to where he knew Kagutsuchi dominated the sky--and promptly did a double-take.

What. The. Fuck.

Seriously.

Now, it was normal for any Looper who had the misfortune to end up in his shit-hole of a Branch to, at one point or another, think of and possibly even refer to Kagutsuchi as a giant disco ball. But no visiting Loopers had ever decided to make it a reality--until now.

(Well, had Pinkie Pie ever visited this wasteland, she might have tried.)

There, up in the sky, Kagatuschi was was covered in a metric fuck-ton of shiny silver sequins, causing its divine glow to be refracted all over the Vortex World in a very psychedelic

manner. Oh, and it was *pissed*, Naoki could tell, from how it was not waxing and waning normally, but in a constant state of pulsations of light.

Kagatsuchi had been bedazzled.

Naoki looked over to Dante, who met his gaze, and Naoki did not even need to ask if he was Awake since the sheer look of befuddlement, tinged with a bit of amusement, let Naoki know that he was.

"Umm...." Dante began, looking back up at the egg of creation turned disco ball; he opened his mouth, then closed it, pursing his lips as he stared at the hovering orb in the sky. The two of them met each other's gaze, managed to hold it for a moment, and then completely lost it utterly.

As they both howled with laughter, stumbling towards one another and leaning on each other for support as the sound of their hysterics filled what was left of the world, Naoki heard Kashima speak from within his heart.

"Truly we have not the words for such a sight..." Even his demonic essence, birthed for the sole purpose of ushering in a world of darkness and chaos, sounded just the tiniest bit amused by what had transpired. "Is the Pink one here?" Kashima asked, referring to the only Looper they knew of in all Yggdrasil that would have the desire to pull of this stunt. Naoki would have sent a Ping, something he neglected to already (and rarely ever did) due to his Loop being so seldom populated by anyone other than his self, native Looper or not, but he was too busy laughing in such a way that he could recall having done since before Baseline.

Dante and he had collapsed upon the street at this point, and was it not for the fact that neither required oxygen to breathe, they would have taken *much* longer to recover.

"Shit, kid," Dante said, wiping away tears of mirth, still chuckling under his breath. "Is Pinkie here?" he asked.

Naoki was still faintly grinning, staring up at bedazzled Kagutsuchi; he shook his head. "No," he answered, having sent out a Ping and received no response, which was not something any of the ponies would do unless they had a very good reason to and wanted to remain incognito, and--let's face it--Pinkie Pie was many things, but stealthy was not one if it did not involve surprise parties. "So either this is a *really* weird Variant--which I doubt--or there are some Loopers that either don't know how to Ping or want to continue to fuck up the landscape."

"Ah, well, should make things interesting, at the very least," Dante said, hopping to his feet and brushing off his clothing. "Once you get past the whole 'end of the world' and the fact that demons want to eat you, this place gets kind of boring after a while," Dante said, removing Ebony and twirling the pistol in a manner that Naoki knew that Revolver Ocelot was fond of.

The corner of Naoki's grin quirked up slightly. "True," he agreed. "So, you want to stick around or go and do your own thing?" the Anchor asked. "I'm going to follow Baseline to see

if anything else is different; Yggdrasil might just be having a glitch, slim as that chance is since this Branch is pretty damn stubborn."

Dante shrugged his shoulders before suddenly cursing as he fumbled his gun, dropping it to the ground. Obviously, he still hadn't mastered the pistol flourish. "Not like I got anything better to do in this place: no beer, no pizza, no strawberry sundaes. Sure, some of the demons are hot, but, meh..." he shrugged his shoulders dismissively.

Naoki rolled his eyes.

...

Okay, something was definitely not right with this Loop.

Usually Naoki avoided having to travel through the Amala network unless necessary or he was feeling whimsical, viewing it as a hassle, to be honest, and he really had *no* need to do, long since having found alternate routes or having Pocketed the items or keys he would need to remove whatever was obstructing his path. But he had went to where he knew Hijiri would be, only to find the eternally cursed man absent. Naoki and Dante had entered the Amala Network, but most of the demons were scarce (unsurprising, given how strong both he and Dante were from the Loops) and more strangely, the lingering souls were missing.

"Most strange, indeed..." Kashima commented, and while his demonic side didn't seem worried (it *never* was worried, as *very* few things except Admins and certain Loopers could match it if Naoki gave it the reins and let it cut loose) the mere fact that it noticed something and chose to vocalize it was a something worth taking note of. Naoki was sure it was connected to Kagutsuchi's graffiti, but couldn't think of who it could be. Certainly there were Loopers that had the power to do such a thing, but none with that required temperament would have the inclination to pull a prank like that; the fact that the Amala network and Hijiri were missing was even more mysterious.

Naoki thought he could sense a presence that seemed like it might have been familiar somehow, but the Network was in a serious state of flux he had rarely seen previous in other Loops, so he thought it best to exit as quickly as he could, not wanting to get Dante or himself trapped in there.

Every place they went, someone or something had cleaned house in some way or another: the Assembly of Nihilo was a slaughter house, the corpses of demon and manikin alike laid strewn about everywhere, their body parts often festively arrayed like macabre decorations and bright swatches of various shades of demonic blood were painted about haphazardly; The Mantra in Ikebukuro was a similar bloodbath: *everything* was red and most of the demons that had made up the Mantra had been decapitated, with Thor missing.

Naoki was beginning to get an idea about what was going on her, but surely....

Wasting no more time, Naoki decided to get answers straight from someone who would know what the fuck was going on. Even the manikins were missing.

And where the hell were the damn Fiends! Sure, they were little more than a nuisance to Naoki at this point in his existence,but it was still tradition for him smash the ever-loving shit of Matador's skull on sheer principle alone for the hell that ass hole had given him Baseline!

Entering the Labyrinth of Amala, Naoki noticed a disproportionate amount of sexually evocative demons: angels, succubi, incubi... Mara....

Thus, upon entering the Third Kapala, he really shouldn't have been as shocked to find what he did.

But still, shocked he was...

"Surprise, darling!" Slaanesh cheered, waving from atop of Hell Biker's motorcycle, proudly gripping the Harlot's chalice that was still dripping with fresh viscera; she seemed to be a bit worse for wear, numerous wounds covering hir body, and the right side of hir was covered in a still healing pattern of burn scarring from what Naoki knew to be Samael's Megidolan attack (proof of the Almighty's element potency once more, seeing as how not even a Ruinous Power--even if shi was the youngest--could completely shrug of such an attack.) Before Naoki could react, shi had leapt from atop her iron horse and locked their mouths and tongues together. Dante hung back, watching the scene with a raised brow, before he turned and saw Khorne, a golden hammer clutched tightly in one of his fists, Trumpeter's horn in his other, grinning at the demon hunter from atop a brutalized Thor who the Blood God had apparently domesticated to act as his unwilling steed. The mystery of the missing Mantra skulls was solved as well: they had been fashioned into a crude throne just behind Khorne.

Tzeentch was no where to be seen, but Nurgle was happily chilling in own little corner, surrounded by many Manikins who seemed to be regarding him with a zealous fervor; upon seeing he was being observed, Nurgle flashed a yellowed and decaying grin, waving happily to Dante who could only return the gesture. Was that Matador's *montera* upon his head?

"Do I even want to know what happened to the Daisoujou?" Dante asked.

"Tzeentch got him," Nurgle said, having given passing out a mutated strain of the Black Death to the Manikins, who recieved it with glee.

"You don't want to know," Khorne's voice cut in, like two coffin slabs grinding against each other.

"Where is the overgrown Warp turkey, anyway?" Dante wondered, looking about for the Changer of Ways.

"He's looking through the Amala Network," Slaanesh said after Naoki had finished extracting himself from hir.

"Well that would explain what happened to Hijiri," Naoki commented.

"The man in that quite lovely suit?" Slaanesh wondered, tilting hir head. "There... was something familiar about him... Like I had met him before but..." the Prince of Pleasure shook hir head, dismissing the notion. "Did you like the surprise!" shi suddenly directed to

Naoki, rocking on the heels of hir feet like an overenthusiastic puppy. "It's the first time all four of us were here at the same time, so we wanted to make it special for you!"

"Do you mean the giant floating disc ball outside and the wholesale slaughter?" Naoki asked. "Yeah," he nodded, "'surprised' might be the correct term to use," he said, smiling slightly.

"I killed the Assembly!" Slaanesh declared proudly. "A world of stillness and silence?" shi sneered, her disdain dripping off hir tone.

"I showed the Mantra who is the mightiest of them all!" Khorne bellowed, waving his stolen godly hammer about; Thor looked like he dearly wanted to be put out of his misery and that no Reason was worth this.

"It is a pleasure to finally make all your acquaintance," a smooth voice cut, all gathered turned to see Lucifer, sitting in his wheelchair suddenly among them. "As fellow beings of Chaos, I welcome you wholeheartedly," he said, sketching a slight bow. He then leaned his chined on his fist, as the First of the Fallen had a habit of doing in this guise, gazing at them with seemingly blind eyes that were anything but. "Long have I wished to make you acquaintance," he confessed.

Naoki had to immediately go over and put an arm on Khorne's shoulder, as the Blood God grinned in a feral manner to Lucifer. Yeah, that was all kinds of "Nope!" right there....

"You!" Slaanesh said, pointing a razor sharp nail at the Lucifer. "I've been waiting for a change to have a word with you!" she said, suddenly advancing on the fallen angel, whose only reaction was to appear to be amused at it, even as Slaanesh hauled Lucifer up by gripping his suits lapels.

"Oh?"

"The only one allowed to toy with my favorite piece of man-meat is me!"

Naoki didn't quite know how to respond to that proclamation: on the one hand, given that Slaanesh was formed from the gathered debauchery of what was, more or less, a thousand-year-long orgy held by space elves, hir saying that was probably the eqivalent of a declaration of everlasting love....

Maybe....

It did go to show just how messed up his concept of reality and what constituted a healthy relationship was that he got the as warm a feeling in what may or may not remain of his heart.

"Is that so?" Lucifer smiled gently, not seeming to mind being manhandled. "My congratulations, on the matter," he said politely. "Your union has my blessing," he told the two of them.

"Yeah... thanks for that," Naoki began, and then stopped when he noticed Khorne produce a sword. "Khorne, is that what I think it is?" he asked with the resigned error of one asking a

question they knew had a stupid answer, but held out meaningless hope to the contrary.

"A vorpal sword!" Khorne crowed! "Plus five!"

"Where did you..." Naoki began to ask, before shaking his head. "You know what, fuck it! I don't even want to know or be reminded of that experience.

Slaanesh seemed pleased enough by the support that Lucifer had given that he released him, glowing with wicked pride. All the while, Nurgle kept trying to give "gifts" to the Manikins without any success, but that didn't seem to damper the grandfatherly beings enthusiasm.

"By the way," Naoki said, ignoring the litany of things Kashima demanded that he relay to Lucifer, mostly about the Tomb of Horrors, "just how pissed off is the guy up top about Kagutsuchi?"

Lucifer didn't answer, only smiled.

[Persona 4], [Gundam]
Kira Yamato's Design – part 5
Author: Drakohahn

Izanagi caught the glowing green blades with his own, blocking them due to his nature as a Persona. After the initial clash, the two swordsmen began a rapid exchange of strokes, slashes and thrusts to probe the defenses of the other. This didn't last long as the Shadow Self broke away to dodge the spells thrown at him from the other Personae.

It was apparently part of their plan as the Shadow Self dodged right into the path of Takeji Zaiten's red blade, which was crackling with surges of lightning. The physical impact didn't do much by itself but the strong electric shocks caused him to wince while swing knocked him into the next part of the plan. Yamato Sumeragi conjured up a trio of brightly colored orbs and brought them together, once Shadow Kira was close enough, into an explosion of Almighty power; knocking the armored foe towards Yosuke and his Persona, Takehaya Susano-o. Wind-coated daggers and fists collided with the now pinballing Shadow Self, dealing little overall damage but keeping him moving on their terms rather than his.

Chie and her Persona, Haraedo-no-Okami, were next on his pinballing path, batting him with icy boot and blade towards Yukiko and Sumeo-Okami where they waited with burning fan and wing. Seeing the flames, the Shadow Self tried to boost off in another direction, but was intercepted and knocked towards the pair by Kanji, Teddie and Kamui-Moshiri. With a united strike of blazing power, Shadow Kira was swatted to the ground.

"He's stunned! Get him!" Yu Narukami shouted as he and Izanagi charged, swords in hand. Once more the inexplicable cloud of dust kicked up as the entire Investigation Team pounced on the armored foe. Eventually, however...

"ENOUGH!" With a sudden and surprising surge of strength, the Shadow Self threw everyone off. Despite the blows they had been landing, he didn't look too worse for wear.

"You're all just a bunch of pathetic Naturals! You have nothing on me! I am the Ultimate Coordinator!"

Every member of the Investigation Team felt an unsettling burst of energy from inside their foe. Rise frowned from where she had been watching with Kouzeon, registering the sudden jump in the Shadow's power.

"Everyone, be careful! Something very odd is happening with the Shadow Self!"

The Team braced themselves, watching their armored opponent to see what he did next. Then he blurred out of sight and Naoto and her Persona were blasted back by sudden beams of green energy. From where Kira sat on his knees in exhaustion and pain from his out of control Shadow, he watched the battle with desperate eyes.

[Nocturne], [Devil May Cry]
Payday for Dante
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Dante kicked his feet up on his solid oak desk, staring at the high-definition that took up almost an entire wall of Devil of May Cry. A younger awake Lady stared in shock at the office, more appropriately at the many suitcases of cash that overflowed with precious gold and jewels.

"Where did you get all of this?" Lady asked, pinching her nose, her fingers tracing the scar that spanned the bridge of it. It wasn't strange for Looper to save up a sizable nest egg over Loops in his or her pocket--in fact, most Loopers would be scandalously rich when Yggdrasil got set to rights and the loops finally ended--but this went a bit beyond the norm.

Dante didn't immediately answer, too focused on devouring a long string of gooey mozzarella from the piping hot pizza in front of him. "I realized something and called in a debt that was owed to me," Dante said.

Lady stared at him with mismatched eyes. "Who would owe you *this* much for a job?" she asked.

"The Devil," Dante said.

Lady blinked. "Excuse me?"

…

Lucifer, currently in the form of an old man in a wheelchair, raised an eyebrow at the demon hunter. "I beg your pardon?" he asked.

"I said you owe me a shit ton of money, Lucy!" Dante said, pointing a finger at him. Lucifer stared at the demon hunter, then to Naoki, who simply raised his hands in a "don't ask me" type gesture. "You see, you hired me to come to his shit hole and kill demons, right?" Dante asked, and before he could recieve an answer, he carried on. "So, by my count--since I'm

fairly certain your at least aware of time being jacked up and if not, then it won't matter the next Loop--I have done your job multiple times over, so that means overtime and interest! You simply hired me 'to kill demons,' well, guess, what? I must have killed tens of millions in this place by now! So pony up the cash!' Dante demanded.

Naoki was gaping in sheer awe at what his friend was doing. He had some fucked up shit in the Loops, but never before did he dream that he would ever see this. As powerful as he was, not even he would dare to deliberately piss off Lucifer, since Naoki was *fairly* certain that Looping or not, the First of the Fallen was one of the few beings in Yggdrasil that could do some kind of lasting damage to a Looper if he went all out.

"Very well," Lucifer said; what use was mortal wealth to him?

"And another thing...." Dante trailed off, realizing that the Devil had agreed, and he was momentarily left flatfooted. He had simply been bored--he didn't think it would actually work. "Yeah, well, uh... that's right!" he finished, somewhat lamely.

Lucifer tapped his cane on the ground, and a scroll appeared. His attendant in black mourning garb handed it to Dante, who let it unfurl to the floor, where it extended comically for a few feet. "I trust this will settle any outstanding debt between you and I, for past as well as future services rendered?" he asked.

Dante stared, mouth open in shock.

"It is, of course, in precious jewels as well as gold, as Macca would mean little to you, I imagine."

...

"You extorted Lucifer," Lady said, her mouth hanging in pure shock.

"Hey!" Dante said, pointing his finger accusingly. "It isn't extortion if a person legitimately owes you money!" he defended.

Lady opened her mouth, wanting to argue that logic, but couldn't, finally settling on sighing and shaking her head.

"Feel free to take a couple ten million if you want, babe," Dante waved to the fortune around him. "This is hardly five percent of what Lucy gave me, called it a bonus for going 'above and beyond' the expected fufilment of my duties." Lady shrugged and wandered over to pick up a few briefcases; extra scratch was always handy to have. "Hell, go nuts on the boob job this loop, babe!" he told her, smiling smarmily.

SLAP!

"I have *never* gotten breast implants!" Lady seethed.

Dante blinked and then looked rather pointedly at her current chest. Damn, sure they were probably a B-cup (nothing to scoff at) but she was what, 16 or 17 right now? Nowhere near the size she would be when the whole shit with Nero went down.

"You don't?" Dante asked. "Well you hit a hell of growth spurt!" Dante said happily. "Maybe it's the priestess blood in your family? Or it could be--"

BLAM!

Dante never got to finish his musings, as a hole appeared in his forehead courtesy of one of Lady's pistols.

When he came too, he would find his small horde of loot taken by a very pissed off female demon hunter.

[Persona 4]
House of Cards: Persona Edition
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Igor carefully--ever so carefully--maneuvered his hands to as to not upset the delicate balance of destiny; the slightest bit of recklessness could spell certain doom after all. His were the hands that had woven fate and destiny, spun whole-cloth from the bonds of human emotion that his guests nurtured, and now once more they shaped another thing.

A pleased smile crossed the proprietor's face as he accomplished his perilous task! None but him would ever know what he had done this day, but that was fine. His own satisfaction was enough.

Just then, the door opened, and the guest that entered simply stood in the doorway, blinking at the sight before him.

His only reaction being a slight clearing of his throat, Igor gave his customary greeting.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room."

Yu said nothing, simply staring. There, upon the table, was a titanic construction of cards, made from Persona cards and tarot cards intermingled. Not saying a word, the Wild Card raised an inquisitive brow at Igor, who simply shrugged his shoulders, though Yu could tell that he was amused by the whole situation.

Yu simply shrugged his shoulders in kind. Igor was the Anchor--it stood to reason he did other things beside wait for them to show up. He'd have to give the man some models, come to think of it.

[Digital Devil Saga]
(no title)
Author: Lurks in the Dark

"So this should be simple," Gale said, lounging back in the Embryon base; everyone was Awake this Loop and they could have a bit of fun.

Suddenly another Ping, not from any of them, registered.

Serph face-palmed.

"Goddammit!" he cursed, closing his eyes. "Naoki is Awake."

"Maybe we can just not fight him?"

Serph lifted his face from his hands. "Remember what happened the last time we did that? He came *looking* for us and ended up crashing the Loop."

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Mass Effect]
Sovereign's New Groove – part 4
Author: Gamerex27

Just as Shepard had begun to launch into a karaoke rendition of the "Fleet and Flotilla" soundtrack, he was mercifully cut off by an earth-shattering crash, followed by the vehicle grinding to a halt.

"Did we find a demon too big to run over?" Pixie asked, unbuckling herself from the seat and glancing at the menagerie of screens relaying techno-jargon to the driver.

"I think so." Shepard got out of the driver's seat and wrenched the door open. Grunting from the strain-it seemed to be stuck in place from debris of the crash-he channeled his biotic strength into the effort, and it slid open just wide enough to let a humanoid through.

Though the shards and splinters of bone littered all across the ground and soil, Shepard saw what looked like hundreds of tiny piles of multicolored slime covering the ground.

"That's ectomplasm," replied Burroughs.

Shepard turned up the comm link keying him into the frequency of Flynn and Isabeau's shared A.I. "Come again?"

"Some residue left behind after ghosts or other supernatural entities lose their physical forms," she clarified. "Unfortunately, I can't tell what *kind* of demon they are from. Almost like they're not from this reality altogether."

"…what happened to the gods of the species the Reapers wiped out?"

The group glanced back at Langdon in unison, several of them stopping mis-stride out of the Mako.

"Humanity alone created thousands of different demons we can summon with the Program," he explained. "Add that to all the others that turians, salarians, asari and the rest came with, and that's a lot of monsters in Burrough;s database. So, if she can't recognize them *at all*…"

"…they may be from those extinct species," Shepard finished. "Judging by how many puddles there are, the White must have some few thousands of them."

"Millions, actually," Burroughs cheerfully corrected.

Shepard abruptly paled, his eyes widening in horror.

“Oh, don’t worry!” Pixie said, giggling and slapping Shepard on the back. “If we could just run them over, one bullet ought to break up what’s left of each demon and god! They haven’t been worshipped for millions of years, right?”

“Belief *does* beget power,” Isabeau confirmed, her mouthpiece flashing with her words. “It’s *very* likely these demons are little stronger than a fly, or an ant.”

“Then why bring them here?” Shepard asked, as Naoki squeezed his massive bulk out of the Mako and jogged to catch up with everyone else.

“I think it’s a…Zurg? No, *Zerg* rush. A game I used to play back in Baseline…like, about 10,000,000 years ago, where the enemies just rushed at you over and over, Thousands of spiders can still kill a man if they all inject their venom at once.”

“*Thank you* for that lovely mental image,” Isabeau muttered. “Thankfully, we are heee*eeerrr^#*#*#^#”*

…

“…now! Shepard, you need to get in there *now!*”

Shepard’s eyes shot open, as he scrambled to his feet and retrieved his assault rifle. Wasn’t that voice…?

“…tear in reality’s code knocked you out! Get in the damned Conduit!” Athena yelled again. “The ritual’s 80% DONE! You have MINUTES before that *robotic moron* shows up here in the offices *covered in your metaphysical guts*!”

“Move! MOVE!” Shepard fired his rifle into the ground, awakening his companions with a start.”

“Wuh…please, let me sle-“ Naoki’s eyes widened as he saw the Conduit’s rapid trembling, and a spire of the Yamato Perpetual Reactor peeking out of the gate to…wherever the White linked it to. “*Aw, crap!* Guys! *NOW!*”

Within seconds, the group had roused themselves again, and broke into a mad dash for the portal.

The second his flesh touched the gateway, Shepard felt the hairs all over his body stand on end, and the smell of ozone drowned out all of his senses.

When his vision cleared, he found himself in a featureless white void.

The only other people there were Nihlus.

And Captain Anderson.

A bone-white, twisted parody of Captain Anderson, with tears streaming down from his otherwise expressionless face.

[Digital Devil Saga], [Nocturne], [Devil May Cry]
Milady (title added by compiler) – part 1
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Naoki awoke in a familiar room and fought the urge to curse his foul luck. He was in the Junkyard. He *hated* the Junkyard!

The demi-fiend once more reflected on how Yggdrasil seemed to personally have it out for him in particular; due to whatever unfathomable disaster that necessitated the implementation of the time loops, the cluster of Branches known as the "Amala-verse" were glitch filled meat grinders filled with gibbering unspeakable horrors and other happy-fun time shit.

Really, it was kind of like the Yggdrasil version of that place in the Hub, Australia: it was easier to list what things *weren't* out to kill you, directly or otherwise.

And he, Naoki Kashima, had the distinct honor of being the lucky Anchor of the most fucked-up, depressing of the whole bunch: the Branch that he and other Loopers had taken to calling "Nocturne," after the video game RPG that was it was its backup in the Hub. But as if that were not enough, Yggdrasil swapped some one's and zero's at some point, so he was sort of also present in this Branch of the Amala-verse, as well (except, well, he wasn't *originally*, but then he was...)

Essentially, functioned like a demonic version of Schrodinger's fucking cat in this rainy shit stain of a Branch; the video-game Hub backup rationalized this as him being a "New Game +" super boss.

This fact Naoki didn't really mind: he *was* considered by the RPG enthusiasts of the denizens that lived in the Hub to be *the* premier secret boss in most any RPG.

It went without saying that he got a hold of this Branch's random battle music as soon as possible and made sure to play it whenever he met up with Serph and company. He will fondly remember to his dying day the look of pure "oh shit!" that crossed their faces when the first time they realized that he simply wasn't some hellish nightmare spawned for the sole purpose of wrecking their shit six ways from Sunday, but a sapient Looper who they stood a greater than average chance of running into during every new Loop because they were all part of the Amala cluster on Yggdrasil.

The downside was, due to his unique status of simultaneously being present in this Branch's Baseline and not being present, he didn't exactly get the luxury of accessing local Loop memories, as he didn't exist in the Junkyard until he suddenly *did.*

The only thing he could do when he found himself thrust into this situation was to let out a Ping to tell the Loopers of this Branch that he was Awake, he was waiting, and they damn well better not think of *not* fighting him, damn it!

The first (and only) time they had thought they could just blitz through the events of the Loop, he had firmly established that he would have *none* of that particular brand of bull-shit; he had left his little room, slaughtering anyone and anything that was either unlucky or stupid enough to be in his path, and murdered the absolute fuck out of those cannibalistic jackasses by spamming Gaia Rage at them until their great grandparents felt it!

Good times...

•••

Serph and the rest of the Embryon were gathered around the foreigner who was replacing Agrilla this Loop; she was a woman dressed in a low-cut white pinstripe shirt and she had shoulder length black hair. The most distinguishing things about her were the scar that marked the ridge of her nose and her dual-colored eyes, one red and the other blue. And she had a rather large rocket launcher attached with a bayonet that obviously had aspirations of being an ax, for how large it was.

She appeared to be caught in the throes of a nightmare--perfectly understandable given that she had just Awoken only to be forcibly turned into a ravenous demon and consumed still living people in her hunger-induced blood lust.

There was a reason why most visiting Loopers usually required a Loop in Pony branch to recuperate from the Junkyard, after all.

Serph frowned; there was something very familiar about this woman--he was *certain* he had perhaps met her before, or at least heard of her.

"Anyone recognize her?" Serph asked, crossing his arms his chest. He let his gaze slide down to the long expanse of creamy thigh that her shorts revealed, and his gaze locked on the demonic brand that had situated itself over a scar there.

Cielo shook his head in the negative, gazing at still woman with a hand to his chin. "No, mon," he intoned, his accent thick as it always was when he was Awake. "I think I'd remember a woman like dat," he said, gesturing to her revealing attire and rather beautiful features.

Heat gave a derisive snort but refused to comment on the matter.

Serph sighed. "I have a bad feeling about this..." he announced.

•••

A steak of light shot towards her as soon as she Awoke, and then Lady felt nothing but agony. It felt as if the blood in her veins rose to a boil and her muscles started to slowly cooking themselves from the inside out. She remembered screaming and screaming until her vocal cords threatened to rupture--how long had that hellish existence lasted? A minute? A week? Time no longer meant anything to the demon hunter--there was only pain.

She dimly registered that the scar on her thigh hurt the most (but his was not saying much), but did not have the mental capability to analyze what that fact might have meant. She felt her skin stretching as her bones twisted, breaking and reforming, as her body threatened to tear itself apart.

And then, merciful oblivion.

She must have had a nightmare brought on by the pain of her injuries. In this nightmare she remembered becoming something... else*. Her stomach was distended heavily, as if pregnant, but no child rested in her womb, instead her abdomen had a gaping fanged maw with a slavering tongue hanging from it; she had not two, but four arms, with two of them eternally cradling her stomach and the the other two ending in weapons of a sort: one was a thin, razors-sharp, bone-like blade; the other arm was disproportionately longer, dragging the ground, and ending in what appeared to be a skull-shaped mass of bone.*

Her ears twitched from where they had been situated atop her head, and face had elongated into a canine like muzzle, but deformed. A chain of severed heads, all missing any features save for too-large predatory grins, rested upon her stomach and bloated breasts, offering some form of modesty, had she even cared about such notions or even possessed normal human anatomy.

Suddenly, the creature whose body she had come to inhabit shot across the battlefield; it didn't so much run as it danced, twirling about, its bladed arm becoming a whirl of death as parted the flesh of its foes and bathed in their blood, spirited by canine-like feet. Numerous creatures were sent flying from her club-like appendage, if not outright reduced to a shower of blood and pulverized flesh.

She remembered her human hands leaving the perversion of a stomach, grabbing a nearby monster, and raising it before her muzzle. She felt her teeth pierce the tender flesh, the sensation of hot blood spilling down her throat, the snap of tendons against her teeth. And then she her bladed arm diced her prey, her human hands greedily feeding it to her secondary stomach, its tongue curling around the flesh and pulling it into the razor maw and the rows upon rows of teeth.

She ate and ate, but never got full.

All she knew was horrible, endless hunger--and death.

Most bizarre, though, was that despite all the carnage and savage feasting in the nightmare, her attention was captured by the glowing mark that resembled a skull on her thigh, imprinting itself into her memory.

...

Lady shot awake, her chest heaving; her exposed skin dimpled against the air, covered in a cold sheen of perspiration from her night terror. Eyes wide, she greedily sucked in lungfuls of air and attempted to work through the adrenaline that was running rampant through her system, causing her limbs to tremble like a newborn babe.

A bitter rancid taste lingered in the back of her mouth, and she felt hot bile rise up in her gorge as the events of her nightmare returned. God... she could *feel* the hot blood spilling down her mouth and filling her throat... how she couldn't get enough....

Lady immediately feel off the cot she had awoken on, impacting upon the hard, cold ground of wherever she was; her body heaved as her stomach worked to empty itself.

Oh, god! She could still taste it! Still bracing herself with one hand, she felt her abdomen, thankful only to feel the toned midriff that was always there and not a distended belly with a slavering fanged maw.

"Uggh..." the demon hunter let out a sound of disgust, wiping her mouth with her sleeve. Closing her eyes, she took in long breaths through her nose and as she attempted to access the Loop's local memories and get a handle on where she was and the situation she was in.

"Are you okay? are you *Awake* yet? Maybe feeling a little *loopy*?" a calm voice asked, and Lady took notice on the strange emphasis that had been placed upon two key words in the questions. Any Looper in Yggdrasil quickly fine-tuned their hearing to pick out those terms in conversation, after all.

Swallowing down the lump her throat, accepted the hand and rose to her feet, seeing she was surrounded by a number of men and one black-haired girl; strangely enough, they all had what looked like tattoos or brands at different locations on their bodies. Strange. "You could say that," Lady muttered, still not having completely gathered back her scattered wits, but she still managed to nod her head in affirmation.

"My name is Serph," the silver-haired man introduced himself with a smile. "I'm the Tribe Leader of the Embryon, and you're in the Junkyard," he explained, though it was unnecessary as her brain spooled fresh memories across her neurons, filling in the missing gaps and getting her up to speed.

"Right," Lady nodded. "I've got it now, thanks," she said, giving Serph a smile. "My name is Lady," she introduced with a smile, only to notice that Serph seem to start at her name, his eyes widening. "What?" she asked.

Serph exchanged looks with the others, who equally looked unsure. "Do you happen to know Dante?" the tribe leader eventually asked.

Lady's eyes widened and she found herself smiling; this Loop wouldn't be so bad, after all, if they knew Dante! "I'm his partner in our home Branch!" she told them. "How do you know that no-good layabout?" she wondered, her hands on her hips that were cocked to one side.

"We sometimes have a Fused Loop with another neighboring branch that he visits as part of Baseline," Serph said, and the penny dropped in Lady's mind.

"Wait, so this is that weird 'Conception' Tokyo, Dante always goes on about?" she asked, gazing about. Strange, it looked nothing like a weird-ass desert wasteland to her.

"No," Serph shook his head. "We're the Junkyard. However, the Anchor of the third Amala Branch, Naoki, is actually here right now... he's sort of a Baseline native only not..." Serph saw Lady's confused gaze and shrugged his shoulders. "It's complicated," he offered, somewhat lamely, but the woman accepted the explanation: the Loops had done stranger things she knew... "I think it's best that we take you to him, all things considered," Serph began, his expression turning uneasy, as if he was suddenly made aware he was in the presence of a bomb that could detonate at any given moment.

Lady frowned. "Why? Shouldn't I be fine here?" she questioned, alarm bells going off in her head at Serph's--and after she cast a quick gaze about, everyone else, too--sudden nervous display and evident discomfort. Something nagged at Lady from the back of her mind. "Wait a minute..." she began, and Serph and the rest of the Embryon cringed, waiting for the proverbial penny to drop (though in this case it would be more like a Megidolan.) "Dante told me about this Branch..." she recalled. "This is the place where you all get turned into..."

Lady never finished that sentence; the blood drained from her face as she recalled the events of the nightmare she had just awoken from. Fearfully, she looked down, dreading what she might find.

"Oh, god..." she said softly, in a pitiful voice she had not made since the night her father had murdered her mother. "No..." she denied, shaking her head futilely, even as the sickly sweet taste of raw flesh and iron tang of hot blood once more filled her mouth. "No, no, no, no, no..." she repeated in a mantra, her hands burying themselves painfully among her hair as she squeezed her eyes tightly shut--but the grinning skull-like tattoo desecrating her flesh still stared back at her, burned into the back of her eyelids.

"Lady..." Sera took a step forward, her hand hovering uselessly in the air just above the demon hunter's shoulder; the beginning of "Pray" sat ready upon the tip of her tongue, ready to pacify the visiting Looper should she enter into a Berserk state.

"No!" Lady shouted, turning a wild gaze towards the younger woman. "I... I'm not a demon! I'm not!" she screamed. "I eat those people!" she insisted; by now her breath was coming in quick, short gasps and darkness was slowly bleeding around the edges of her vision. "It's not real... it's not! I'm human! I'm not like him! I can't be like him!" Lady insisted, memories of her ghastly feast filling her mind unbidden, but now a new phantasm had joined the battlefield: a white-faced jester, who grinned approvingly at her from the end of his comically long nose.

*"*That's *daddy's little girl..."* the Jester whispered silky in her mind and his words were like arsenic-laced honey. "*I"m* so *very proud of you, Mary. You're just like* me!*" Her father's demonic form burst into maniacal glee, falling to the battlefield and kicking his legs up into the air wildly.*

Sera was about to start the words to her song, when Heat took matters into his own hands, stepping up behind her and slamming a closed fist into the back of Lady's skull with a meaty thump; the demon hunter collapsed into Heat's waiting arms like a sack of produce.

Sera glared harshly at the red-haired Embryon member, who simply shrugged. "Would you have preferred we have a rampaging Ashura, instead?" he asked, and none present could

really argue that his action was preferable, even if they disapproved on the matter with which her accomplished it.

Serph watched as Lady was put once more on the cot. Turning, he headed toward the door. "You all keep an eye on her," he commanded, heading for his destination.

Gale, who had remained silent throughout the ordeal, looked to his retreating leader. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to get Naoki," Serph said, and the rest of his friends immediately looked alarmed.

Cieolo looked open-mouthed at his friend. "What?!" he demanded with evident shock. "You're bringing that psycho here!" he demanded. "In case you might 'ave forgot, da last time he was here, he reduced this place to rubble!"

Serph sighed, rubbing his temples. "I know..." he acknowledged their concerns. "But he knows Dante the best out of all of us--if anyone will know how best to help Lady, it will be him," he explained, his voice carrying in it a pleading tone that begged his friends to understand why he was doing this.

Sear nodded her head, and though she was still unsure about inviting the demi-fiend into their midst, she cast a worried look towards the comatose Lady, whose face was twisted into a fitful frown even in her dreamless sleep. "You're right..."

Heat simply nodded his head. "You are the leader," was all he said on the matter, for it was as simple as that--both in the Loop and beyond, that would never change.

The rest all seemed to accept his reasoning. Of course it helped Serph that there would be no true lasting consequences to the action--the very worst was that Naoki (though he tended to allow Kashima more leeway when in the Junkyard, Serph knew) would simply kill them all and cause the Loop to reset. Granted, that would be the quickest way to remove Lady from her situation, but Serph didn't want her possibly Looping through Yggdrasil in her traumatized state. Most likely she would end up back in her home Branch where Dante could see to her, or if she was lucky, she would Loop into the pony world and they specialized in fixing these sorts of problem, but any Looper who had been in the game long enough would tell you that despite all evidence to the contrary, Yggdrasil had a twisted sense of humor and could be downright spiteful at times.

Lady looping into another Amala Branch or ending up in Warhammer 40K was not something he was willing to chance in her state, however improbable the chances might be.

…

Naoki idly flipped through the pages of the Tomb of Horrors module book that he had gotten from Tzeentch, recalling the absolute cluster fuck that had been his attempt to get the four Ruinous Powers to successfully complete it. That experience was so profoundly stupid that Naoki was shocked that he didn't automatically pop a rage boner simply out of spite whenever he recalled the many hours of hell he had been subjected to.

"Maybe I *will* let you recreate this place," Naoki mused, rubbing his chin. "If nothing else it will be something to do, and it would be funny as hell to throw Khorne into it," he thought.

"Indeed," Kashima, the sum of all his demonic instincts replied. "Though I do wonder what would be the outcome of Billy wandering into it...." his not-so-better half mused.

Naoki cringed (a knee-jerk reaction *every* Looper developed sooner or later whenever the stupid MLE was brought up.) "He'd probably destroy it," he answered. "Heavens knows he's done more impossible things in the past," he commented.

"But it does gladden mine heart to imagine otherwise," Kashima said. Naoki felt a grin crossing his face and he found himself forced to nod, a vision of Billy stumbling into the Orb of Annihilation fililing his mind. Hell, all he'd have to do is put up a sight pointing to the mouth, with an arrow and the words "Free Ice Cream."

The door to the room opened, and Naoki sent his book back to his Pocket with a thought. "Finally! It took you losers long enough!" he groused. "I was about to go out and hunt you dumbasses down," he said, and then stopped as he noticed Serph alone, an unusually serious expression on the tribe leader's face. "Hey, what the hell are you doing?" Naoki demanded, raising an eyebrow. "Don't tell me you think you can actually take me one-on-one!" he demanded. Sometimes it let him interact like any other visiting Looper and others it would randomly have a blue screen of death for seemingly no reason.

Serph simply looked at him grimly. "We need your help," he told the demi-fiend.

Naoki had to stop himself room laughing. "Excuse me?" he demanded. "No, that's not how it works. My job is to beat on you freaks--nothing else!" he reminded. That was, more or less, quite literally true--the coding for this Branch was very *particular* when it came to what it allowed him to do without causing a Loop Crash.

"Agrilla got replaced by Lady," Serph cut in, and Naoki was brought his tirade to a dead halt, staring at the local Anchor, not sure he had heard him correctly.

Naoki licked his lips absentmindedly. "Lady?" he questioned, hopeful that it was some other Looper named Lady that Serph would feel the need to come inform him about. "Dante's friend, that 'Lady'?" he clarified.

Serph nodded.

Naoki was silent, the implications going through his mind. Ending up in the Amala-verse wasn't a picnic for any non-native Looper, but this Loop had a special kind of fucked-up all of its own: namely that visiting Loopers were put through the trauma of painfully being converted into monsters against their will and forced to engage in acts of cannibalism and the consumption of raw flesh usually at least once, when they first went berserk as their Loop-implanted "demon" coding was forcibly activated.

Sure, the Embryon had found alternatives to having to consume raw flesh, but sometimes a Looper was taken by surprise by a Loop and couldn't react until certain events had already been set into motion.

"Did she..." Naoki asked, not having to finish his sentence. Serph nodded, even more grim.

"Fuck." Naoki began pacing the room, his hands clenched in fists at his side. "FUCK!" he yelled. This was just fucking great! Any other Branch of Amala and Naoki was certain Lady would have been fine given her demon-hunting skills, but she just had to land in the fucking Junkyard, with her history. Sure, she got over her hatred of demons in Baseline, but there were a whole slew of Daddy issues that this was probably bringing up, on top of the cannibalism. "I don't suppose it goes without saying she didn't handle it well," Naoki spat acidly; Serph didn't answer him, he didn't have to.

Naoki stopped to think about what to do, only to draw a blank. "Shit," he muttered. He didn't know what he could do in this situation to fix things, but he damn sure knew what he could do anyway....

"Come on," he grunted, stalking past Serph. The leader of the Embryon turned and followed him without a word, silently pitying any rookies that had the misfortune of getting between Lucifer's chosen general and his mission.

Miscellaneous 12

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Tincanman125

Yu could practically feel the headache coming on after he finished checking his loop memories; to be honest, he was hard pressed imagine a worse scenario to loop into right now, and he was currently discussing solutions to this new problem with his uncle.

"Ok," Yu stated, "our problem is as follows: Tohru Adachi has a powerful politician for a brother and his family is very influential, and out of all the people my mother could have married this loop, she chose the one related to a serial killer."

"Don't forget, the Dojimas are an equally powerful rival family." Dojima added. "Aside from my sister, I'm the only one who gets along with anyone in your father's family, and politics are extremely volitile this loop."

"Right," Yu groaned, "at best, this is going to lead to a divorce and a huge scandal, and at worst we're sitting on a ticking time bomb which could change the balance of power in Japan's government."

"I still say we do what we always do," Izanagi said, "how bad could things get in a year?"

"I'm not even going to dignify that with a response." Dojima deadpanned.

Izanagi just rolled his eyes. "Look it's simple, we set him up for an 'accident' and problem solved; then we just pin Konishi and Yamano's deaths on some other serial killer and deal with Izanami."

"So you want us to commit first degree murder, falsify evidence, and send someone, admittedly not someone innocent but still, to jail for a crime they didn't commit?" Dojima asked, outraged. "How would that make us any different than him?"

"Because, we'd do it for the right reasons." Izanagi said bluntly. "It'd get rid of not one, but *two* dangerous criminals, the victims' families get closure, and we avoid any family problems while the government maintains the status quo."

"On one hand it goes against everything I've believed in since baseline," Yu stated, "but on the other hand, I don't think we have any other options other than having Igor crash the loop, and the only time he's ever done that on purpose is when Philemon and Nyarthotep switched roles." Yu explained. "He says it 'undermines the rights of non-loopers to choose their own destinies.'"

"Fine." Dojima said in a disgusted tone. "I won't stop you, but I won't have any part in this, I refuse to become like the monster living in my head."

[Persona 4]
The Awakening of… Adachi?! – part 1
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Adachi reclined back in his chair, propping his feet on his desk and putting his hands behind his head, not giving a single shit whatsoever that his fellow former collegues were staring at him in a strange manner. Why should he? They were all creations of his tortured subconscious to punish him, after all.

You see, Adachi had awoken one day to suddenly find that he had somehow gone back in time and was once more stuck in fucking Inaba, shortly before he had begun his little murder spree for shits and giggles. At first he thought he was having one hell of a nightmare, but stubbing his toe quite viciously had quickly disabused that notion from the murderer. So, given that he could feel pain, the only explanation was that he had somehow died in prison (probably got shanked in the shower, damn it!) and he was in Hell, being tortured. Except, instead of hot iron brands, meat hooks, and wooden racks, whoever was responsible for the afterlife had decided that it was a far more appropriate punishment to stick Adachi back in fucking Inaba.

Really, Adachi would have grudgingly applauded the vindictive asshole if he wasn't so pissed off at him or her for this. You know what, he bet it was that bitch Izanami who did it, for ratting her undead ass out to those kids--she was the goddesses of death and the underworld, right? Fucking bitch. I mean, sure, he deserved it--but he wouldn't have taken hot iron rail road spikes over being stuck in this place.

"I was right," he commented to himself with a wry smirk as he stared listlessly at the slowly turning ceiling fan, "this place *really* is Hell."

Though he didn't notice it, Doujima was frowning at Adachi, staring at his former--and now once-more--partner from above the rim of his coffee cup. He had Awoke this Loop and had gone through the usual motions of the Branch; the only thing of note was that everyone was Awake this Loop, including Nanako, which was always nice--and Adachi. Adachi was acting strange--even for this being, as far as he could tell, a Variant based off of the other man's behavior. For a few days, his partner had looked absolutely wrong-footed, his eyes darting about everywhere and unusually distracted, but he seemed to have simply decided he didn't want anything to do with his job and had been making strange comments.

Why would he think he was in Hell? Granted he was sure that Adachi had made similar comments regarding his posting to the small rural town, in Baseline, but his wording of that sentence bothered Doujima for some reason. It was like Adachi thought that he was actually dead, and he seemed to sometimes pause just before certain things happened....

Doujima's eyes widened and he nearly dropped his coffee cup in shock.

No....

It wasn't possible....

Was Adachi Looping?

Doujima fought the urge to curse violently and felt a sudden intense migraine come on in an instant at the thought. He *did* not need this! The last thing he wanted to deal with was his partner Looping! Granted Nanako would be thrilled and Adachi and his nephew seemed to have a strange sort of camaraderie, given that the two were essentially archenemies.

Doujima sighed, glanced at the clock, and came to a decision. Grabbing his coat off the back of his chair, he stood up, announced that something with Nanako had come up, and grabbed his lazy partner by the back of his shirt and demanded that he follow him.

"What?" Adachi said, baffled.

"Get your ass moving, damn it!" Doujima barked, all but shoving him out the door. Adachi grumbled and groaned, shoving his fists into his pockets and making a comment that Doujima almost didn't catch under his breath about him being, "just as much a pain in the ass as the first time."

Goddamnit! He *was* Looping!

Entering outside, Doujima quickly reviewed his options: From the Ping responses he had received, unless their visiting Loopers, his nephew and his friends were all Awake, just not physically able to get to Inaba just yet--as with Rise, Naoto, and his nephew. Taking out a cigarette, he lit it up and thought. Yes, he could easily handle Adachi with the knowledge and skills he had gained while Looping, but this was something that had to be handled delicately if he didn't want to set the new Looper off. With any luck, maybe he could be talked into not killing anyone--heavens knows he had seen far worse criminals than Adachi be set on the straight-and-narrow throughout Yggdrasil.

"So," Doujima commented, blowing out a stream of smoke as he came to a decision, "you ever get déjà vu?" he asked suddenly, in what must have seemed to be out-of-the-blue.

"Uh..." Adachi looked at his boss strangely. "Yeah.... sure?"

Doujima made a thoughtful noise, tapping the accumulated ashes from his cigarette onto the street. "So, you planning on pushing anyone into any televisions?" he asked, deliberately not glancing at Adachi except from the corner of his eyes, and the older man smirked as he saw Adachi freeze in shock and make a strangled noise in his throat as he, no doubt, stared at Doujima with pure shock.

"Come on," Doujima demanded, heading to his car. "Nanako will have dinner on the table," he said. "Oh, and if you try *anything*, I won't hesitate to stop you," he said.

Adachi said nothing, his mind racing as he attempted to figure out what the hell was happening! Was this some sick joke of the afterlife? Eventually, the killer managed to respond, defaulting to the comfort of the familiar as he snidely commented to the back of his boss, "Yeah, like a gun can scare me."

Doujima glanced over his shoulder and raised a brow. "Who said I was going to use a gun?" he asked with a smirk, and he allowed the demon that he usually kept under strict lock and key in his mind maifest, flashing a wicked grin at his partner.

Adachi stared, his mouth opening and closing like a beached fish, eventually he did the only thing he could: follow his boss and get some goddamn answers! First and foremost, why the hell did Doujima just turn into a some kind of fucking monster!

Man... why couldn't he ever catch a break?

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Spectrobes]
The escape pod – part 29 and Intermission
Author: Tincanman125

===Crash Site, Nox===

Aldous wasn't sure why he hadn't summoned the stone colossus who wielded a large kiln that he had come to know as Epimetheus; instead using his Evoker had caused an iron giant covered in broken chains to appear, though he no idea why said chains were made of fire.

Equally inexplicable was this new Persona's striking resemblance to Epimetheus.

As though to provide clarification, the giant spoke:

"Thou art I, and I am Thou!" The giant bellowed as it released a wave of fire to destroy some nearby Krawl. "From the sea of thine soul I am reborn! I am Prometheus, he who stole fire from the gods!"

Aldous couldn't help but reflect on how convenient it was that his Personas had a tendency to shout their names the first time he summoned them.

===Meanwhile===

Maja swore to herself a short ways away from Aldous' most recent display of pyrotechnics; she did *not* need another complication right now. It was just her luck that the old man's Persona had evolved right after she felt Gelberus' life force be snuffed out. Sure he'd managed to destroy that tower first, but Maja still wasn't ready to attack Kollin yet.

...There was nothing for it, she'd have to make her move now before she lost the chance; she simply let out a sigh of frustration as she opened a portal to the insignificant ball of ice that was now Gelberus' grave.

===You in Wonderland, Haven in the Rift===

"Is that really you Jeena?" Rallen asked with a huge grin on his face.

"Yeah," Jeena replied with a warm smile, "it's good to see you again!"

"You two know each other?" Junpei asked as he watched the pair hug.

"Yup," Rallen responded, "we're practically family."

"Let's get out of here," Yosuke suggested, "this doesn't seem like the best place to catch up."

===Food Court===

"Wow," Rallen said after Jeena filled him in on current events, "it must have been really awkward dealing with them."

"Yeah," Jeena sighed, "even Yosuke and Naoto were surprised, and they're looping."

"At least they didn't show up here too," Rallen commented, "I'm no scientist, but I'm pretty sure it would have caused a paradox."

"So any loopers in your group?" Jeena asked.

"We have a few," Rallen told her, "besides me, it's Shinjiro, Mitsuru, and Aigis." He said. "Zen and Rei seem to be looping too, Mitsuru says they'd fight differently otherwise."

"Well, as fun as this has been, we should probably head back," Jeena suggested, "I'm not sure the other loopers can stall everyone else for much longer."

[Persona 4]
Yosuke used Defog! It's Super Effective!
Author: Tincanman125

"Are you sure you're up for this Yosuke?" Yu asked. "The fog in Inba this loop is some of the thickest I've ever seen."

"Don't worry about it," Yosuke grinned, "I'm one of the best magic users on the team remember? Hell, my Arcana is the Magician for crying out loud!"

The pair shared a chuckle, they'd come up to the hill overlooking Inaba because Yosuke had picked up a new trick in a Pokémon fused loop that he wanted to try out; and it was indeed a fact that he was the best offensive magic user on the team (Naoto having chosen to spend her time on learning how to best cripple enemies and Yukiko researching how to heal with maximum efficiency).

"Well, I guess there's no harm in trying," Yu admitted, "worst case scenario you'll be tired for a few hours and nothing will happen."

"Ok, here goes nothing!" Yosuke shouted as he poured a massive amount of energy into the defog attack he'd picked up as a Staraptor.

The result was so powerful that Yu didn't just feel the shockwave, he could quite literally *see* the air ripple before hitting the fog, and when it did it looked like someone had taken a torch to a oil field, the fog wasn't merely being pushed back, it was being destroyed.

Little did they know that Yosuke's technique was *also* affecting the tv world, they had only figured *that* part out when they felt Ameno-sagiri writhing in his death throes.

"Did.. did I just kill a *god* with what people said was the most useless HM move ever created?" Yosuke asked in disbelief

"I think so." Yu said flatly, having been too stunned to put emotion into his voice.

"Think anyone will believe us if we tell them?" Yosuke asked.

"I was *here* and *I* don't believe it." Yu responded.

[Devil Survivor 2]
…Jungo… why!?
Author: Alternis_Alcor

“Nope.”

“Hibiki, it’s not that bad. Quit over-reacting.”

“Nope. No way. The Septentriones attacking over and over, I can handle. The Triangulum attacking over and over, I could eventually handle. Polaris suddenly retiring so she and Canopus could go elope in Vegas, I can handle. This? THIS is too much for me. Done, I quit, I’ll see you in the next Loop.”

Jungo watched the retreating boy leave before turning to Daichi. “Did I do something wrong?”

Shaking his head, Daichi replied, “Nah, he’s just being weird. Give him some time and he’ll come back.”

Pastry baker Jungo nodded, deciding that he would make some manju for Hibiki when he came back.

[Persona 3], [BioShock: Infinite]
Koromaru Does Columbia
Author: Tincanman125

Father Zachary Hale Comstock was currently watching his beloved Columbia burn from his private airship, he wasn't sure where exactly the beast that his forces had dubbed "The Hellhound" had come from, though he suspected Dewitt had something to do with its presence, for it had been first sighted at his side during the day of the raffle.

He'd remember that day for the rest of his life, for that was when his Eden had begun its transformation into the Hell he saw before him...

===Day of the Raffle, Koromaru's POV===

Koromaru was unsure where he was, but it did not matter, for it was new and exciting! Many of the small humans had given him food, and he had even found a new friend (who gave him the best food).

His new friend was very tall, much like pack-mate Shinjiro, and his new friend had the fair skin and light colored fur of She-Who-Understands, therefore Koromaru knew that his new

friend must be a good person, for how could anyone who was like his pack-mates be bad?

As such, Koromaru decided that he would follow his new friend until he could find a way to bring him back to the den to meet his pack-mates.

===Booker's POV===

Booker Dewitt had no earthly idea why this dog was following him around, but he hoped that it'd be smart enough to hide once the shooting started (and it would start), because no matter what Booker did, he always ended up winning that damn raffle, and no matter what he tried, they'd always figure out that he was their "False Shepherd," and things just kept going downhill from there.

"What I wouldn't give for some backup for once." He muttered to himself as he decided to draw a baseball and get it over with.

===Koromaru's POV===

At first Koromaru had been confused when the other humans attacked his new friend.

Then he heard the noise.

Koromaru did not know what the noise was, but he did know that the noise either meant that something bad was about to happen, or was happening already.

...He had learned that lesson on The Second Day of Great Sadness.

But things would be different now, because Koromaru knew what to do when he heard the noise.

The noise meant he had to call The Alpha.

===Booker's POV===

Booker didn't know why both he and the officers stopped fighting each other when the dog who had been following him up until this point howled, nor why he had a sudden feeling of dread crawling up his spine.

He did however figure it out pretty damn quickly when he saw the giant three-headed wolf.

The monster spat out purple flames around a group of officers, then a symbol appeared under the group, with the fires seemingly linked by the lines on the ground.

Then a large torrent of what could only be described as unholy fire erupted from the ground, only to die down seconds later, leaving no trace of the officers.

The rest fled for their lives.

Booker had tried to look for the dog afterwards, but he couldn't find any sign of the cute little furball.

===The Raven House, Koromaru's POV===

Koromaru was unsure how he had gotten here, the last thing he remembered was saving his new friend before being distracted by a butterfly (which he then proceeded to chase), and when he came back his friend was gone, though he did find a drink spilled on the ground with his friend's scent on the bottle. Naturally he had assumed it was left for him (because he was a good boy), and lapped it up off the ground.

The drink had been spicy, but now Koromaru was at one with fire just like The Alpha! Perhaps this was the "enlightenment" that the Old Master often spoke of.

It was at that point Koromaru noticed a bird, at one time he wouldn't have bothered chasing it, for he had no way to reach it without The Alpha, and The Alpha should not be bothered with such trival things; but now Koromaru could reach it, and so he chased, often spitting flames at his prey (and unwittingly causing the largest fire in Columbia's brief history, resulting in the entire district burning to the ground), and at some point he'd ended up at this building.

===Hall of Heroes, Booker's POV, Some Time Later ===

"That's quite a story." Elizabeth said. "I mean, I don't think we've ever seen a dog in Columbia before, let alone one that can summon a monster."

Booker was about to respond when he heard a familiar bark and suddenly was lifted off his feet.

"Well, at least we know where he is now." Booker deadpanned.

===Koromaru's POV===

Koromaru was happy, not only had he found his friend, but his friend had brought another friend, and she was very nice.

She was so nice that Koromaru had run off to get her a present, but as he had no idea what would make a good present, he just decided to find the nearest group of humans and get something from them.

And it just so happened that the nearest humans were Slate's men, and Koromaru thought that their yelling meant they wanted to play.

...Koromaru also didn't realize that humans didn't like playing "fire ball catch," especially not around gunpowder and live ammunition.

...

Koromaru liked the magic trick the humans did, it was impressive how they made such a large building disappear, and in his opinion the bright flash was the best part!

He wasn't such a fan of the loud noises that came with it though.

Still, he had found a nice, shiny bottle of ...something, for his friends, he hoped they'd like it.

===Elizabeth's POV===

"I like this dog," Elizabeth said as she held the sleepy shiba inu, "can we keep him?"

"Yes," Booker said, "but only because I want to see Comstock's face when he realizes a dog destroyed his city of sky racists."

[Nocturne], [Warhammer 40000]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

"This isn't how it's supposed to work," hissed the Unawake Chaos God.

"Is it?" Kashima asked, producing a cigar and lighting it with a snap of his fingers. Not that their body *could* become ill from using this: according to Naoki, it was customary for humans to smoke after they have mated.

"*You*," shi hissed, "are supposed to *break*. I have my way with you, and suck out your soul like a bowl of pasta. *Why can't I do that?!*"

"As the Sons of Man say," Kashima said, taking a puff, "'you bit off more than you could chew.' Perhaps in the literal sense this time, though I suspect it will not take long to grow back."

"I..." Slaanesh floundered under the covers, then grabbed Kashima's head and forcefully turned it to face hir.

"***Submit***," shi hissed, pouring enough power into hir gaze to make the most straight-laced Eldar start servicing hir on the spot.

"***No***," Kashima replied, in the exact same tone.

Snarling, Slaanesh tried to grab ahold of his soul and eat the damn thing so shi could move on to hir next toy.

But, try as hard as shi might, it just *wouldn't budge.* If eating a normal soul was like taking a bite out of a slice of pizza, this was like trying to eat a still-living cow that was fighting back.

And if the cow was made of perfected titanium.

And covered in spikes.

And completely invisible, since it was nigh-impossible to *find* the damn soul in the first place.

And on fire.

Screaming in frusturation, Slaanesh punched Kashima square in the face.

Rocking backwards from the blow, he frowned, and grabbed hir hand. "If you wish to strike someone," he said, "do not place your thumb inside your palm when you create a fist. Doing so would most likely break it."

"Oh, fuck off!"

"Try placing it above your fingers," he continued, unperturbed. "It shall help hold your fist closed, and therefore be more lethal."

"FUCK! OFF!"

[Nocturne], [My Little Pony]
Demon Negotiation – part 2
Author: Gamerex27

She should have known something was wrong when her castle's Map cut off mid-signal.

"Where the hay's everypony?" Applejack asked, as the group of five (Fluttershy was visiting a friend that day) walked throughout the deserted town.

"It doesn't look too old," Rarity commented. "It looks like ponies lived here just recently. I don't know *how,* since all of the architecture and decor is drab and dull enough to put anypony to sleep."

"I...think they evacuated," Rainbow Dash said, putting the pieces together as she glanced at the ground. "Look down. See all the hoofprints? Judging by how far apart they're spaced, I think they stampeted outta here in a hurry."

"Maybe they had a flash mob or surprise party somewhere outside of town?" Pinkie Pie suggested. Her usual ear-to-ear grin had diminished somewhat: there was something about the atmosphere of the town that put a damper on her spirits.

"Some kind of emergency, I think," Twilight said, as she cast a simple scrying spell. "They ran away from something...no, some*pony*."

"What was the matter?"

"I...whatever it is, somepony's still here." Twilight glanced at an alleyway between the houses. "Come out. We won't hurt you."

"I sincerely doubt that you would," said a stallion's flat, nearly-emotionless voice. "Or *could*."

Slowly, a brown-coated colt trotted out from the shadows. Glancing at the group of five, he frowned. "So, you came after all. Lesser mares may have fled in terror at what happened here."

"So...you know what went down here?" Dashie asked, taking a step back from the intimidating unicorn in front of them.

"That I do," the other pony declared, the black markings on his coat swaying as he stepped forwards. "I shall tell you what transpired. But only to *her*," he said, pointing a hoof at Twilight.

It suddenly dawned on Twilight who this was, as the combination of the markings, the too-sharp horn, and the Cutie Mark of a pony's bleached skull came into view. "If...if you're sure about that."

Assuring her friends that she wouldn't be too far, and that they could come running if they thought anything at all was up, she followed the being into the cave on the edge of the abandoned town.

…

"**-been trying to feed a pet cat,**" the titanic creature made entirely out of sapient blood asked Fluttershy. "**Would you happen to know what they like to eat?**"

"Um..." Hesitating, Fluttershy glanced back towards her companion out of the corner of her eye.

"Tell him whatever comes to mind," Naoki said. "Or whatever he wants to hear. That usually works better."

"...they'll eat a lot of things, really," she continued. "But, they usually prefer small rodents. Freshly-killed mice usually gets their attention."

"I see," the beast rumbled. "**The newly-shed gore gets the attention of a carnivore. Maybe now she'll stop meowing all over the place when I'm trying to work.**" Smiling, the demon knelt down to her eye level. Fluttershy forced herself not to back away as some of the beings blood splashed over her. "**I should probably get going, but here's something for your trouble. You wanted me to Contract, right? I need to go on a company retreat, but you can have 10 Hunger Tarot cards to call be back later**."

"It worked this time?" Fluttershy asked, as the demon faded into nothingness and the small pile of playing cards fell to her forehooves, and the hoof-mounted computer on her left. "But that pony in the bodysuit tried to push me into traffic when I tried to help her cross the street. Why do I keep getting...mixed results?"

"You're treating 'em like they're all the same," Naoki explained, as he batted past a crowd of incubii leering at a group of sirens on their Girls' Night Out. "That was a soundless *shinobi*. They *hate* sound, and was just messing with you to see if you'd figure it out. Always go wordless with them." He sighed. "That Rabbit a few Circles up? He left 'cuz he *didn't* want those carrots. Doesn't matter he looked like a mortal bunny: he's a primordial force of fertility. The schoolgirl-looking one tried to gut you because she wanted a pencil rather than advice. And that generic fairy left mid-talk because you gave her too *much* money: they don't like people who can't say no. Treating demons like they're some faceless mass of monsters

who all think alike will either get you nowhere or in the graveyard, fast. And everyone gets bad results sometimes. About a quarter of *my* negotations end with the demon trying to *maul* me, no matter what I say."

"I *know* that," she said. "I've have *some* success. I've got some Tarot Cards for later summoning, I made a truce with a few angrier ones, and I even got a free flue shot from that one dead nurse. Why can't I get consistent results?"

Because you're not used to any hardship or dissent at all, a bitter voice said at the back of Naoki's mind. *Just mind-bash everyone into thinking the same.*

Fluttershy's expression hardened, and she gave him a Stare at around 44.44% intensity.

"...what?" Naoki asked, his face twisting in confusion.

And you're an angry, mean misanthrope who drags everyone else down with him!

Fluttershy abruptly turned red. "Um...I didn't say that!"

"No..." Naoki said under his breath. "You...thought it..."

In the blink of an eye, the Demi-Fiend had darted across the room and yanked a giggling, floating brain out of a bush made of dead branches. "Knock it off, *jackass!*"

After punting the meddling prankster into the horizion, Naoki sighed, rubbing at his head with a forehoof. "We didn't say that out loud: it must have been dicking around with some telepathy bullshit.

"Look," he said, turning back around to face Fluttershy, "I can't just forget about the Bureau overnight, or what I did to you guys when I lost it. It's gonna take *time* for my brain to stop jumping from 'pony,' to 'racist homogenizing horse.' And I'm sure you've got something similar with me. But I'm *trying*."

"I know," she said. "It can be easy to forgive...but much harder to forget. But we do what we can. Fix things, piece by piece."

Both of them were silent for a few moments.

"...this is the last layer, I think," Naoki announced, trying to change the subject as they moved deeper into Tartarus and waved some stolen passes towards some sleeping guards.

"Indeed," rumbled a deep voice. "This is the last. For you."

Trembling in anger, Tirek stepped out from the shadows, every hair on his coat bristling at rage upon seeing one of the ponies that had humiliated him so.

"...should I try negotiating with *him*?" Fluttershy asked.

"...*what.*"

"Don't see why not," Naoki said, shrugging. "I mean, he *is* a demon, right? Not all of 'em are open to normal talks-"

"you *dare* ignore-"

"-so we may be better off waiting until a full moon," Naoki continued. "Those mess with some demons' minds. Or-"

"I am *standing right*-"

"-could try using one of Langdon's fancy apps to calm him down enough to talk," the Demi-Fiend went on. "The DEMONICA can do some really weird shi-"

He was cut off by a blow to the head, sending him crashing into a nearby wall with a painful-sounding *thud*.

"*Don't you dare ignore me!*" the incensed centaur roared. "*ME! LORD TIREK!*"

"Don't care," Naoki grunted, climbing to his hooves. "Look, Timex, or whatever-"

"*Ti. Rek,*" hissed the demon, as he opened his maw wide.

"...wait, *that's a really bad idea!"* Fluttershy gasped, jumping onto her hind legs and waving frantically to attract the monster's attention away from her companion.

"*YOUR MAGIC IS MINE!*"

•••

"What did you do?" Twilight asked as soon as they were out of earshot.

"Come again?" Naoki(?) asked as he sat back on his haunches, spitting onto his forehoof and wiping something off of his horn.

"The entire town stampeded out of here, the wall of Cutie Marks is empty, and Starlight is nowhere to be seen," she clarified. "What did you do?"

"Let us not dance around the topic," the man agreed. "I killed her."

"Why?"

"You *know* why," he snorted, wiping the brown-colored mix or saliva and...dried blood...off of his horn. "I suppose you're expecting me to recount how I used some grand, ironic punishment on her. Drawing and quarteting her in front of her entire dictatorship, maybe? Flaying her alive, perhaps? No. Every journey begins with a single step, Twilight Sparkle. And, so too, do they end."

The Princess of Friendship glared at him.

"A single step at roughly under the speed of sound," he explained. "It is difficult to tear out someone's soul when you are bleeding out the throat and jugular vein. No grand humiliation, or magnificent plan. The look on her face when she realized that her plans were undone was enough for me. The town didn't even get past the first verse of their song before she fell," he recalled, smirking.

"This is a Sanctuary Loop, Naoki. We won't do anything to hurt you, but that doesn't mean you can go around murdering anyone you want."

"I am not Naoki." Red eyes blinked at her in irritation.

Twilight stared, likewise blinking in confusion.

"I am born of him, but not him," said the entity in front of her. "A demon, crafted out of the human's id by Lucifer himself, for the purpose of striking down the Great Will. You may call me Kashima, if you must name me."

Twilight briefly recalled something her daughter had told her in between sobs after that fateful Loop-how a red-eyed version of the Mad Anchor held off the enraged Naoki's presence in his mindscape as she delved deeper in to combat the Shadow.

"It doesn't matter who you are," she said. "You *can't* go around killing whomever you want."

"Why not?"

Twilight stared at him in disbelief. "Because...killing people is *wrong?*"

"Is it?" Kashima asked, tilting his head slightly.

Twilight saw no malice, no mockery, no arrogance in his eyes. Just confusion.

"...oh, sweet *turnip*, you don't actually *know why*," she said, facehoofing. "Alright, let's start from the beginning."

In the span of three minutes, Tirek had gone from a haughty monster to a quivering, shrieking demon trying very, *very* hard to hide himself behind a convenient boulder.

"Found you, Timex."

Screaming, Tirek tried to scramble away, but was summarily smacked in the face by a tossed rock. Yelling in pain, he fell to the floor as blood began to trickle from his broken nose

"Can't really think of any catchy one-liners at the moment," a bored-looking Naoki said as he cantered to the fallen centaur, the binding magic of the cursed stone kicking in. "So, I think I'll just kill you now."

"Wait!" the demon screeched.

"Oh, and stealing some MP doesn't guarantee victory," he idly said as he lifted up a forehoof towards Tirek's center-of-mass. "I mean, most of my attacks run off of physical health-or HP,

as nerds would say. Besides, I've got enough Magatsuhi crammed in my Pocket to make up for whatever teeny bits of power you made off with. If any. At all."

"Please! I'll do anything!" he begged as Naoki pulled back his hoof for a final blow. "I'll...I'll form a contract *just let me live!*"

"Wait!"

From somewhere behind him, Fluttershy tackled Naoki to the ground.

"Yeah, forgot to mention some demons bargain when you're about to smash their faces in," he grunted, as both of them got up.

"So, I just hold this up, and-"

As he openly wept from fear and shame, Tirek dissolved into a stream of ones and zeroes, flowing from the ground in front of them into Fluttershy's COMP.

"Congrats," Naoki said, slapping Fluttershy hard on the back, "you've got your first demon. A Tyrant-class one, no less. Those tend to be high end. Ish."

"Glad to hear it," Fluttershy said, blushing a little. "So, do I need to remember to break the Contract before the Loop ends, or-"

"Nah, demons get ejected from a Compendium before the Loop ends." Naoki brushed some of the dirt and tears from the fight off of his coat. "The data's still there, though. You'll be able to get your own Timex out of there whenever you want. Provided you'll pay the Macca."

"Tirek, not Timex."

"Same thing." Naoki grinned, his troubles finally pushed to the back of his subconciousness for the moment. "Let's keep going. Up to tracking down Trumpeter and smashing his skull in with his own trumpet?"

...

"So that is why," Kashima said, *hours* after Twilight had begun.

"*Yes! THANK you*!" Twilight said, her mane long-since frayed from exasperation of having to explain the entirety of an Ethics 101 course to what she had clearly learned was a sociopath.

"Mh." Truth to be told, Kashima *still* didn't really get it.Nor did he particularly *care*. He was *not* human (or equine), and the finite was always tough to understand for immortal Amalan demons.

Yet, he supposed it was in his nature to kill, as an incarnation of Death Itself.

He could not blame the eagle for flying, or the serpent for sliding on its belly. Not could he blame the pony for befriending others and bringing them into their herd over death. Strength in numbers, he guessed, as they *were* a prey species.

"Tell me, though," he said. "One of the reasons you listed for this is because murder breaks the law of your land."

"Yeah. You don't want to be thrown in jail for the rest of the Loop, right?"

"A foolish justification. Harmony is nothing more than a transitory-"

"Oh, *no you don't!*"

Suddenly, Kashima was yanked off of his hindquarters, and found himself dangling in the air in front of a *furious* Anchor.

"I have *had it* with people like you *complaining endlessly* about how 'friendship is a lie,' or 'power comes from isolation,' or 'friends tie you down,' or *any of those road apples!* Don't you *dare* start on *that lecture!* I've heard it a hundred times, and I WON'T hear it again! It doesn't matter if it's a rainbow beam or just having people to support you! Friendship *is magic*! Not *foolish!*"

"...Of course it is," Kashima said, with complete sincerity.

"...za?" Twilight said, dropping Kashima to the cavern's floor suddenly.

"All of these foes, you have vanquished through the bonds you have made," he continued, picking himself up. "The allies you have wrought, the connections you have forged, the power you have gained from doing so. Attempting to deny that there is *power* in the bonds of Man and Mare is an exercise in futility. Amongst so many Branches in Yggdrasil, this concept appears again and again and again. I would be a fool to dismiss it after the sheer amount of support your ideals gain.

"All these dangers on this planet," he went on, motioning out the cave's mouth. "Beasts seeking to rend you limb from limb. Tyrants and overlords dot the landscape, ready to rip the freedom and power you hold dear from you and make you their slaves. The planet itself is stagnant, and would rot and decay into nothing without constant, neverending supervision. All of these lethal threats, dealt with without even raising a single hand against them. All of them, toppled by friendship." He smirked. "People dismiss you and your folk as little more than babes and weaklings, all due to your forms and philosophies. But I know better. You are warriors. Each and every single one of you. Fighting 'gainst death and entropy each and *every* day: not through spells or blades, but through words alone. That...is worth of respect, Twilight Sparkle."

"...then...what *were* you going to lecture me about?" Twilight asked, baffled.

"Harmony," Kashima spat, as if the word were a dirty curse. "Do not claim that all things are balanced, and that laws or order mean anything in the long run. We both know better."

Kashima had suddenly gone form the other side of the cave to right in front of Twilight's face. She did not flinch in the slightest, staring the world-devouring demon right in the eyes, devoid of fear.

"Just as Man has eaten of the Fruit of Knowledge," he proclaimed, "so too has Mare. Do not pretend otherwise. I see it in your eyes. I smell it on your breath. You cannot close your eyes and return to ignorance. The knowledge that harmony and equality are naught but transitory states have sunk in: chaos is the natural order of things. I claim not to understand it, but Friendship does indeed transcend the laws of reality. This is a fact you have proven, time and time again. Yet I know for certain that Harmony does not.

"But you have your wish," he said, backing off. "I shall go to pains not to slay anyone for the duration of my stay here, unless I am directly provoked into a fight. I shall...what did you suggest?"

"Pranking...them," Twilight said slowly. "It's a lot more fun to mess with your enemies than to just kill them. Killing only ever does one thing: it makes people die. Pranks can be *so much more*."

"I see." Kashima broke into a grin, with far, *far* too many teeth than any herbivore was meant to have. "Why didn't you just say so in the first place?"

Twilight froze in place. For several seconds.

"I would have gladly agreed to torment my foes than kill them, had you said so in the first place," he said, still grinning. "No lecture needed."

A few moments later, Twilight's friends (who had patiently been waiting outside the cave, and had just wrapped up an impromptu game of Eye-Spy courtesy of Pinkie Pie), were jolted to attention by the sound of roaring rapids, followed by a surprised stallion falling out of the cave on a gargantuan wave of water.

Screaming in nonsenseical anger, Twilight put away her supercharged squirt bottle, replaced it with a foam sword from her Pocket, and proceeded to go to town on the demon.

"I was considering a spar, anyways," Kashima said, eventually getting to his hooves and parrying her blows at the first opportunity. "Non-lethal, since you so insisted. A god, and a demon meant to kill one. Let us see who is victorious."

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Tincanman125

This had been a rather interesting variant for Yu, instead of being a transfer student who had come to Inaba for the year, Yu had Awoken to find himself several years older and a devout Shinto priest on a pilgrimage throughout Japan. However, his unAwake self had put that mission on hold when he'd detected supernatural involvement in Inaba's murder case.

Surprisingly enough, everything had managed to progress in a fairly baseline manner, though this time an unAwake Yosuke had lead the Investigation Team and Yu had been a victim of Namatame misguided attempts to "save" people.

Currently though, Yu was confronting Izanami, and his plan was to use the most potent weapons in his arsenal: sheer audacity, his boundless charisma, and knowledge he picked up as a looper.

…

"So mortal," Izanami said smugly, "you know who I am, and yet you've still decided to confront me?" The deity chuckled. "You're either very brave, or extremely stupid."

"May I ask a question?" Yu asked. "You are no longer wearing your mask, so I assume you've must have reconciled with Izanagi, so why are you meddling in mortal affairs?"

Izanami had been thrown completely off guard by Yu's unexpected inquiry, "How do you know about that?" She asked. "I know for a fact that we've never met, and there's no way someone told you, I've been watching everyone who knows." Though it was unspoken, the threat that she would kill him if he didn't answer her was obvious.

Yu simply sighed and shook his head, "Judging by your reaction it seems you haven't even spoken to him yet, waiting won't make things any easier." He chastised her. "Still, that's not why I'm here. As the ruler of Yomi the daily lives of mortals are none of your concern. In short, you've overstepped your bounds, and angered a large number of forces far more powerful than yourself," he carefully omitted that he was one of those forces, "and I'm here to see what the problem is."

Izanami scowled at him, it was likely that the only reason that she hadn't tried to kill him was that she thought he was a messenger, and she probably wanted to be sure that whoever sent him wasn't powerful enough to be a threat.

"But now that I'm here the reason is pretty obvious," Yu stated, "your mitama are horrifically unbalanced."

At this point Izanami was a bit curious as to what he was getting at, so she let him continue.

"To start off with, your Ara-mitama is completely out of control, I can't say I've ever seen this much pent-up aggression, and while your Kushi-mitama is normal, your Nigi-mitama is outright stunted, and I can't even detect your Saki-mitama," Yu explained, "just let that sink in: I quite literally cannot detect any positive emotions from you at all, it's almost as if you forcibly ejected it from your very being, I can help you, but I'd need to know what happened to it."

…

After a quick trip to the Velvet Room to pick up Marie, Izanami agreed to put her plans on hold while Yu booked a vacation for them in the Bahamas, where Izanami met a nice young man named Magus who gave her what she would latter claim was "the best back rub I ever had," and by the end of the loop she'd forgotten why she'd been in Inaba to begin with.

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Mass Effect], [Admin Shenanigans]
Sovereign's New Groove – part 5

Author: Gamerex27

"...annnnd they're gone. Of *course* they're gone." Sighing, Naoki looked around the empty, monochrome void he found himself floating in. "Figures. No one ever lasts *then*, why would they last *now*?" he asked himself, bitterly.

"-lo? Hel-*looooo?"*

*"*PIXIE!" Barreling forwards, Naoki shortly made it the equivalent of around a mile across the void in a few dozen seconds. "Thank *Lucifer* you're he-" Naoki would have blushed if he were still human. He should *not* have said that. That made him look needy and whiny, and *damned* if he let himself look like one of those many whiny *shoenen* protagonists for dealing with something every Anchor ever went through. "I, uh, could really use reinforcements," he corrected himself.

"Alright, whatever you say," she said, giggling a little. "So, this is their part of the Expanse, right? The Monochrome Forest, Flynn called it?"

"That's right." Glancing at the faint outline of a tree in the distance, Naoki pulled out his outdated cell phone and activated his Compendium. "Hope they show their asses soo, or-"

"*Our Third Son, who chose Upheaval."*

"Right on cue," the krogan said, turning 180 degrees to face his enemy, as the Fiends materialized behind him. The second he saw the White he was to fight, his face twisted in rage. "*You motherfucker.*"

The White stepped forward, taking the form of a tall woman with plump lips and wavy, short hair.

"Tryin' to guilt-trip me that I haven't saved them yet?" Naoki said, his voice lined with steel. "Moron. I've got *all* the time in the world to find a way. That ain't gonna work."

"After all this time, you still fail to realize," the White Yuko said in monotone. *"You know, deep within your nucleus, that you cannot save them.*"

"Shut up."

"Your stubborn will to fight that which cannot be defeated," she continued, *"is the cause of your own suffering.*"

"...Mister Naoki, what is she talking about?" Alice asked, tugging at Naoki's arm. "Can we kill her now? The speech is making me bored." She didn't notice as Naoki trembled with rage, the White's words having struck an inflamed nerve.

"Indeed," agreed the Trumpeter. "The longer we delay, the more time they shall have to play their discordant note and destroy all. *I* shall be the one to blow the Trumpet, not *they*."

"Finally, something we all agree on," Naoki said, stepping forwards and edging ever closer to the White.

"We shall crush that will, to bring this world sal-"

White Yuko was cut off when Naoki's fist flew right though the reflective defenses she had summoned and socked her square in the face.

With a howl of pure rage, Naoki forgoed words entirely, lunging forwards again and firing a swarm of laser from his arm.

•••

"No time to waste," Langdon muttered to himself, as he released the Fiends. "See anything?"

"They cannot hide, even in their own realm," Pestilence bragged, his skull leaning forwards to look further. "I am known as Conquest, in addition to my current title. None can hide from my bow."

"This is a battle we cannot afford to lose," War agreed. "Should we lose, all will have never come to be. This is not a war of glory they seek: it is obliteration."

"Be on your guards," Famine advised, as his horse reared up briefly. "I can smell him."

"Our Fourth Son, who chose Neutrality."

As the White stepped out from behind a tree, Langdon tensed up. The large, bald head, the imposing, heavy frame, and the suit made it clear whose form the White had stolen.

"Real ballsy of you, stealing Commander Gore's body like that," Langdon commented, as the DEMONICA'S HUD fired up and provided the unexpectedly high level of his opponent.

"Do your synapses not tell you that your struggle is meaningless?" White Gore asked, flatly. "*You shall never rescue your fellows. Your hope to save them from the hands of demons and God is abonimable, mired in ignorance. I shall show you the truth of despair.*"

"There's *always* another way, no matter tough things seem." The soldier said. "Humanity-or whatever species you find-is resourceful, and we *will* stop you and everyone like *you*...No matter who we may lose along the way," he admitted, "we'll still find a way to beat the odds. And you."

"A foolish sentiment from a cancerous cell," White Gore declared, his eyes glowing an even brighter shade of white. "*I shall crush you and your ideals. Behold, the splendor of Nothing*."

•••

"Flynn?"

The only light in the void was the blinking spot on Isabeau's faceplate. Everything else was coated in a thick layer of fog that made seeing anything beyond a few meters in front of herself impossible. According to her suit, she was...nowhere. But she knew where she was. Judging by what Flynn had told her of his journey, this was none other than the Momochrome Forest.

"Langdon? Naoki?...Shepard?" Shivering a little, Isabeau accepted the suit's suggestion to turn on internal heating. But it wasn't physical cold that gripped her heart right now.

Hundreds of years, she had been alone, scared and confused in the endless cycles of Mikado and Tokyo. Even though Flynn had now joined her in her journey, it was still disturbing. People moved the same, talked the same, did the exact same things unless she interviened...It was eerliy reminiscent of that novel by that Orwell man she had read a decade back.

And yet, she would have taken those cities of automata over this vast void.

Blinking, Isabeau suddenly remembered that her suit had a communicator build into it. Firing it up, she tried to zone in on her partner...her *friend*'s location.

"Please be here," Isabeau begged. "I...I'm not strong enough to go alone...not yet..."

"-Beau?"

"Flynn!" Releasing a breath she had not known she had been holding, Isabeau jogged forwards towards a grove of ash-white, semi-ethereal trees. At the center of it stood Flynn, tapping away at the Demon Summoning Program on the holographic Gauntlet-an omnitool, she recalled-to summon the strongest demons he could.

Looking up, his face twisted for a moment. Those awful appendages on the sides of his mouth flared out, his eyes narrowed, and his jaw opened to-

Wait. That was the turian equivalent of a smile.

"Thank the Lo-" Isabeau quickly stopped herself. "I'm glad you are here. Have you found them yet?"

"They are usually found inside pits in the ground, in an attempt to limit our options in the battlefield," he recalled, as the Fiends came to answer his call. "However..."

"Our Fifth Son, who chose Neutrality."

"They need us dead as fast as possible," he continued, as a figure formed in front of them. "So, they cannot afford to wait." He flinched slightly, upon seeing that this White has *still* retained the form of Issachar.

"*Are your vacuoles still filled with such feeble hopes?*" the copy of Flynn's forever-dead friend asked. *"As long as the status quo remains intact, you shall forever be shackled by the Gods. Forever trapped in this cycle of eternity. The only way out is oblivion.*"

"Do you even hear the words you say?!" Isabeau asked. "All you speak of is cowardice and resentment against a tragedy with no one to blame. Maybe there *is* no way out. Maybe we *will* be stuck in these Loops forever."

She unsheathed her blade in one smooth motion and pointed it at White Issachar's throat. "But there are more worlds outside our own. More people. I know now that I shall not always be the only true person inside each Loop." She glanced briefly at Flynn, then to her Gauntlet

where Burroughs waited. "Not anymore. You use feeble excuses to justify your weak wills and hearts to make it end, without even *bothering* to try and find a better way."

"I fell for your honeyed words once," Flynn said slowly, pointing a double-barreled Love Gun pistol at the mockery of his childhood friend's head. "**Never. Again**. Prepare yourself. *We will* stop you!"

"Then I shall return you to nothing, so that we may save this doomed world from its suffering." As Flynn let loose with twin bullet shots, White Issachar leapt over the bullets, grunting in pain as he was grazed by a splash of burning liquid from the Whore of Babalon's goblet.

"Let us make this a battle worth singing about!" David cackled with glee, as explosions and fire rang all about the Expanse.

And, as reality trembled, Athena and Masakado shared a worried glance countless dimensions away.

"They *have* to win," Athena said, her determination and desperation clear on her face. "We can't hold anything back here."

"Understood," Masakado agreed, turning back to his own terminal. "We *need* to win. Or else, these people shall have never existed at all."

[Persona 4]
The Awakening of… Adachi?! – part 2
Author: Lurks in the Dark

Adachi grumbled to himself as he once again found himself buying cabbages at Junes. Letting out a puff of air, he eyed one of the leafy green heads with extreme disinterest; damn, he couldn't wait to able to use that Pocket that Dojima told him about--maybe then he'd be able to save up some scratch and be able to eat above the level of a janitor....

The detective could feel the weight of the piercing gaze that drilled into his back. Behind him, that Hanamura brat was looking at him a constipated expression, his arms cross; Adachi couldn't fault the kid, though, since he himself would be pretty damn confused in his shoes. Dojima had told him a fantastic tale about how the Universe (in a metaphysical sense instead of astrological one) was fucked up six ways to Sunday by some unknown event and now multiple realities were all stuck on "replay," with the occasional crossover of realities to spice things up. Normally Adachi would have called bullshit, but Dojima had known future events, and really, he could summon a demonic version of Japanese god from his psyche and dicked about in an alternate reality that existed within television sets, so the story of the Great Multiverse Tree wasn't really that far-fetched to Adachi--oh, and his boss had turned into a literal demon and flashed a set of *very* sharp-looking teeth at him, threatening to eat him if he pulled anything. There was that, too.

So he was eternally stuck in this podunk cesspit of a town, being washed over by the bungling do-gooder brigade and his boss who was not a cannibalistic pseudo-demon. Man,

didn't that just figure for his life....

Adachi let out a sigh, selecting a cabbage, but not before momentarily giving it the same glare of utmost contempt and disgust that he gave all those other whores before he had thrown them into the-- He shook his head; no, no! Do *not* fall back into that mindset.

Grumbling, the once-killer stalked off to pay for his damn cabbage.

…

Yosuke watched Adachi, confused. He had sent out a Ping and then confirmed with everyone else that this was one of those uncommon Loops were the entire Team and Dojima and Nanako-chan were Awake, which was super and all, but he also was keeping an eye on Adachi to head off the murders before they began--as did Chie, Yukiko, and Kanji who were all in Inaba prior to the murders starting--but it had passed the time that Adachi normally attempted to kill Mayumi Mayano and the female reporter still lived, and, in fact, Adachi seemed to be going out of his way to avoid both her and Saki, according to what he and the others present in Inaba had been able to figure. But, then again, Dojima was acting slightly strange (almost smug) and Nanako was in even greater spirits then usual from when all of her friends were Awake once more.

Yosuke sighed and decided he should just chalk this Loop up to being a Variant of some kind. At least everyone would have fun finding out what the wrinkle in the situation was, when they all got together.

…

On the way back to Dojima's, Adachi made a detour to pass by the gas station and made a point to glare at the goddess in disguise.

"Fucking bitch...." he muttered, stalking off.

…

"Adachi-san!" Nanoko cried out, and Adachi suddenly found an excited young girl wrapped tightly about his legs. The detective fidgeted, not sure how to react; Nanako was one of the few decent people who deserved to have nothing but good things happen to her, and yet life just kept throwing shit on her plate last time around--what with her mom dying, her dad a workaholic (not that he had helped in that regard, he would admit,) and then getting shoved into the television and nearly dying.... Adachi forcibly swallowed the lump of bile that had risen into his gullet at the memory of the event that he was partially responsible for--he had been ready to personally murder Nanatame himself for that.

He still considered sending Yu that note telling him to give up on the investigation and Nanako-chan the worst thing he had ever done in his life.... And Nanako knew everything he had done, knew what kind of a person he was, so why did that girl still look at him like he hung the stars in the sky and personally made the sun rise? Damn kid was too damn trusting and forgiving, and she'd get hurt one day, damn it! Dojima should have spoken to her about that!

"Uh... yeah, hey, Nanako-chan..." Adachi began, glancing over to the watching Dojima who only seemed amused at his plight and offered only a mirtful snort into his coffee cup. Fat lot of fucking help he was. "You, uh... you seem to be in a good mood?"

"Big bro is arriving tomorrow and everyone else is coming early, too!" Nanako chirped, rocking on the balls of her feet, her hands behind her back. "Well... Rise will be a bit late since she has to deal with her idol job first, but she should also be here soon!"

Adachi's eyes widened. Shit, was that tomorrow? He glanced at Dojima, who gave him a silent nod in confirmation. Aw, crap... this was going to suck!

With a face that suggested he was being forced to juggle raw sewage, Adachi spoke, "Yeah... yeah that sounds... great..." he said with a sigh, hanging his head down.

Sensing the tone in his voice, Nanako looked up at her long time friend and the person she considered an uncle in concern. "What's wrong? Aren't you glad to see Big Bro and everyone again?"

Sighing, Adachi walked over and put the June's bag on the table--Dojima glanced in and barely held back the snort of laughter that threatened to send black coffee out of his nose, upon seeing the cabbage contained within the plastic bag--and then fell boneless against the couch. "In case you've forgotten, your 'big brother' and his friends hate me..." Adachi said flatly.

Nanako puffed out her cheeks in an adorable manner and put her hands on her hips, looking for all the world like she was ready to kick someone's ass for some perceived slight. Knowing his luck, it would be Adachi's. "But you're good again!" she insisted, causing Adachi to blink at her. "You made a mistake and were punished, but now you have another chance!" she declared. "And I know you won't do anything bad again," she said, nodding.

Adachi simply stared, his mouth agape. Holy shit. Holy shit! She was serious, wasn't she? Befuddled, Adachi looked over to Dojima, who merely shrugged and shook his head, saying that he was on his own in this. Licking his suddenly bone-dry lips and swallowing down the lump that had formed in his throat, Adachi fidgeted the collar of his shirt. "Well... I mean... no..." Adachi began, "I'm not planning on killing anyone--I mean, I couldn't even if I wanted to with all of you watching me like a hawk.

Dojima was not impressed by the answer, and he leveled a look at his partner to show it. "I should hope that isn't the only reason why you aren't murdering people," he said deadpan.

"Killing people is bad, Adachi!" Nanako lectured, much in the same tone that an adult would tell a young child that it wasn't a good idea to stick objects from the ground in their mouth.

Jesus Christ, this was actually happening! "No!" Adachi quickly assured them, shaking his head. "You threatened to *eat* me, for god's sake!" Adachi said, pointing an accusing finger at Dojima. Nanako quickly switched her gaze of reproach to her father, who squirmed beneath her piercing glare.

"Dad!" she said sharply. "You're not supposed to eat people!" she scolded, and Dojima, hardened detective who had interrogated confessions of out of murderers, squirmed beneath his younger daughter's gaze. Adachi couldn't suppress the slightly maniac giggle of glee that passed his lips at the scene. Dojima gave him an absolute filthy look that promised not-so-fun times when they returned to work. But then, a thought occurred to him. "Hey, boss?" Adachi began, turning to the father. "Have you told anyone else about me 'Looping'?" he asked, still not familiar with the concept or word.

Dojima frowned at him, wondering what his serial-killer partner could be getting at. "No, not yet. Haven't got a chance too, and I was simply planning on letting them know when they came to town anyway. Why?" he asked, his eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Adachi grinned, and Dojima could see the cunning that had allowed his partner to kill under his nose in the baseline show through. "How'd you like to have some fun with them?" he asked, turning his gaze from parent to child.

Dojima raised an eyebrow at him and Nanko simply blinked up at him.

...

"I tell you, partner, it's strange..." Yosuke said as the group, minus Rise, all stood in the elevator on the way up to the food court. "He hasn't done a single thing, and he's been acting off, but I can't really tell how," he said, his hands behind his head as contemplated their normal nemesis's behavior this Loop.

Nanako nodded her head, concurring. "Kanji has explained much the same to me when we speak over the phone," she reported, causing the larger blonde-haired delinquent-type boy to flush red slightly at the causal admission that he and Naoto stayed in touch.

"Hmmm...." Yu considered everything that had been told to him; all signs pointed to this simply being a Variant of some kind, but something did seem off.... The doors opened, and the group stepped out to where their usual table was, only to all stop at the sight before them.

There were Dojima and Nanako--unexpected but not unusual seeing as they were also Awake--but with them was a third person, gazing smugly at them all.

There, Adachi was, dressed in sterotypical black-and-white prison striping.

"I'd like to say it's good to see all you brats again, but who I am kidding?" Adachi said, his feet crossed at the ankle on the table. "By the way, I'm not planning on killing anyone, so you can all untwist you're panties, by the way..." he said casually, getting a sharp swat to the back of the head from Dojima for speaking in such a manner in front of Nanako. What the Hell!? Adachi could understand the notion for it, but Nanko was a very mature girl for her age the first time around, who knew how much she actually knew from how many other Loops she had done. Now that was strange thought: Nanako was probably older then Adachi, technically speaking, at least.

Yu, to his credit, didn't react other than raise his eyebrows slightly, while Yosuke and Kanji just seemed to lose their shit and stare like the gormless idiots they were. Chie seemed ready

to literally kick his ass into oblivion at the slightest sign, and Yukiko was stunned into inaction. Naoto only regarded him with an analytical eye.

Yu sighed, pinching the bride of his nose.

Adachi was Looping.

Fantastic.

Though, he had to admit, a part of him was truly glad.

Miscellaneous 13

[Persona 4], [Gundam]
Kira Yamato's Design – part 6
Author: Drakohahn

Things quickly went south for the Investigation Team as they were placed entirely on the back foot. Defensive and healing spells abound to try and keep up with his attacks as the few times they could occasionally fight back was dodged despite Rise's Supreme Insight. In fact, due to Variants where some members joined up earlier than normal, it felt like they were facing an enhanced, machine version of Shadow Rise. Unfortunately, that meant they needed something to tip the scales back in their favor to win here.

Izanagi glowed with intense light as Yu called forth his next Persona, shattering a card in his hand once again.

"Izanagi-no-Okami!" The light dispersed to reveal a now white and gold Izanagi with his spear turned into a giant ring with two parallel blades, the belts that had been hanging from the back of his head were now replaced by long blades, the smaller blades on his feet had extended out into longer, golden blades and his helmet had become sharper and less human.

"*Thou art I, and I am thou...*
From the sea of thy soul, I come...
From the very moment of my emergence, I have been a guiding light shed to illuminate thy path...
I am the original god...
Izanagi-no-Okami."

"A god?" The Shadow Self mocked. "You think you can beat me with a mere god? You can't match me! I AM BEYOND YOU! I AM ULTIMATE!"

Yu and the empowered Izanagi merely faced him silently, the others recovering in case they had to step in to assist. The Shadow Kira's remote pods launched from their docks on the giant ring on his back and zeroed in on Yu and his Persona.

"Die where you stand, Natural!" A few dozen green beams of energy shot towards the pair. Izanagi no Okami floated in front of Yu and spun his blade, the attack splashing harmlessly on the Persona's weapon. "WHAT?!"

The white god Persona rocketed towards the out of control Shadow Self, jabbing with his weapon. The green beam blades in Shadow Kira's hands flashed forward to deflect the oncoming stab while counterattacking with his own thrust. Izanagi turned the deflection into a spin to block the attack. With his free hand, the Persona blasted the Shadow Self with an intense burst of lightning.

Reeling back from the blow, the Shadow Self redirected his pods around the mighty Persona. The white Izanagi spun his weapon once, releasing energy that engulfed the surrounding pods

in fire. They couldn't take the damage, exploding and depriving his foe of his all-directional attacks. Losing himself in rage, said Shadow Self snarled as he brought his blades to bear and charged. More blasts of fire were dodged with ease by the oncoming attacker, causing the mighty Persona to meet his foe in melee combat.

Blades clashed as Shadow Kira tried to use his speed to circle around Izanagi, looking for an opening in his opponent's defenses. However, while he was proving faster than the white Persona, his techniques were becoming less skilled and more wild as his rage continued to grow. Finally finding an opening in the Shadow Self's defenses, one deflected blow allowed Izanagi to blast his foe in the face with powerful flames.

"N-NO!" The raging Shadow Self cried as his body stopped following his commands. Izanagi-no-Okami backed away from his foe and held the ring of his weapon with the Shadow Self in the center. He spun the weapon, drawing in powerful energy. Once fully gathered, Izanagi unleashed it upon the downed Shadow Self in three explosive bursts. Shadow Kira was sent reeling from each one until he collapsed onto the ground.

[Nocturne], [Warhammer 40000], [Disney]
Yggdrasil's Undisputed CAH Champion
Author: Gamerex27

"I'm all but *certain* he's cheating," Magnus growled, pointing to the offending entity.

"I'd *know* if he were cheating," Tzeentch muttered, sipping whatever brand of intoxicant Slaanesh had cooked up this time from the broadcast on a nearby monitor. "He isn't. Mind you, *I'd* be winning if I were playing-"

"Oh, *come on*," Slaanesh pouted. "You're not playing because I'd *dominate* this game in seconds!"

"More likely that he is scarred by what he has seen of our encounters to come anywhere near the three of us," Kashima speculated. "Hence why he hides behind circuts and plasma rather than play at a game as he is wont to do."

Shivering, Tzeentch proceeded to switch off his video feed and went to audio only. "Not taking any chances! Not *ever again!*" Several seconds of deep breathing later, the players heard the sounds of the God of Change chugging his drink on the other end of the line.

"But I *do* have to agree that this *is* bullshit," Slaanesh growled, leaning across the table and pointing hir finger accusingly at the being across from hir. "You're beating a Primarch of Chaos, *both* of my fuckbuddies, one of the angriest and most sexually repressed men I've ever met-

"*Hey!*" Donald Duck objected, smacking Slaanesh over the head with Save the Queen.

"-and *me*, a deity of fun times," shi continued, showing no response save narrowing hir eyes at the final player of their game. "This is *my* game, *bitch*? How are you *beating* me?!"

Shi's got a valid question, Naoki asked mentally. *Dude, how have you won **any** black cards in this game, much less around two thirds of 'em*.

The final player was silent for a moment.

"Gawrsh, Slaanesh," Goofy finally said, tilting his head in confusion. "I dunno? Maybe I've got beginner's luck?"

"This is the third round we've played tonight!" exclaimed Magnus. "Luck only gets you so far!"

"Clearly, there is more to his desires than he shows," Kashima said, smirking and leaning over the table. "Tell me, have you ever experienced that last card firstha-

He's from the Disney Branch, moron! Naoki interrupted. *They're as pure and driven as snow! He's probably...I dunno, stumbling through this with luck!*

"Ah. So, you are the Fool, walking off the edge of the cliff."

"....Eyup!" Goofy said, shrugging and pulling up the small pile of white cards to judge them.

"You *know* they just insulted you, right?" Donald grumbled, as Goofy picked his card and slid the black category card over to his friend.

"Hey, bein' a Fool's a good thing where those folks are from!" Goofy said, grinning obliviously.

As Donald facepalmed, Slaanesh proceeded to leer at the knight while the Demi-Fiend and Primarch stared at him in confusion. And the game went on.

[Persona 3]
Ikutsuki vs. the Gaslight
Author: Kalimaru

Sitting in the lobby of the SEES dormitory, Chairman Ikutsuki was enjoying a cup of tea and contemplating the end of humanity. He put his cup down on the table, only to pause when he heard the clink of breaking ceramic. Looking down, Ikutsuki noticed that he'd put his cup on the edge of the table and that it had tipped over the side and shattered upon hitting the carpet. He clicked his tongue in frustration, and after looking to see if anyone else was in the lobby he retrieved a broom to clean up the broken ceramics. He wrote off the accident as a product of his pre-occupied mind.

…

The next day, when all of the SEES members had gone upstairs, Ikutsuki walked behind the welcoming desk and was promptly jammed in the side by one of tables. Placing a hand on his side to slightly relieve the pain, Ikutsuki noticed that the foot of the table was definitely out of place. There was a well worn divot in the carpet where the table had been positioned for a long time. The fact that he could see it told Ikutsuki that someone had moved the table.

Perhaps one of the children had done while cleaning and simply forgotten to put the table back?

…

A few weeks later and Ikutsuki was getting fed up. Everyday, he seemed to drop something off of a table or injure himself by walking into something in the SEES dormitory. Even when he went out of his way to avoid some of the furniture, he'd somehow manage to run into the exact chair or table that he'd been trying to walk around. As such, he'd made sure to keep his eyes on whatever piece of furniture he felt might be most likely to attack him next. This only worked half of the time, and made Ikutsuki feel self-conscious whenever he did it around the children. Still, it was better to look foolish and to be in less pain than to leave the matter be and continue to get hurt so excessively.

…

Ikutsuki stepped into the SEES dorm on the last day of summer vacation. He made sure that all of the furniture was where it was supposed to be, and slowly walked towards the stairs. As he made his way up the stairs, he noted just where all of the SEES members were. Most of them were gathered to play a card game on the girl's floor, with the only missing members being Mitsuru and Minato. Since he already knew that Mitsuru was still at school and preparing for tomorrow, Ikutsuki began to idly wonder where the blue haired boy had gone.

He shouldn't have dropped his guard.

Just as he reached the landing before the top floor, Ikutsuki rolled his ankle. His balance was immediately thrown off and Ikutsuki found himself falling backwards down the stairs. Hearing Ikutsuki coming, Akihiko jumped to his feet. This sent the chair that Akihiko had been sitting in, a rolling swivel chair that he'd borrowed from Yukari's room, right to the bottom of the stairs and directly into Ikutsuki's descent path. Ikutski landed on the chair, instantly breaking the base and sending them both careening down the next set of stairs. Both bounced off of the wall of the landing and Ikutsuki landed face first on the floor. Picking himself up, he managed to stand and straighten out his clothes.

Then he stepped on the chair and was sent tumbling down to the ground floor. A sickening crunch could be heard as testament to Ikutsuki's nose breaking when he landed on his face a second time. As a final insult, the broken chair followed Ikutsuki down the stairs and bounced off of his head.

Akihiko was by his side soon after, attempting to left Ikutsuki off of the ground. "Chairman Ikutsuki! Are you alright?"

Ikutsuki's response was unclear, muffled by a broken nose and the increasingly bloody carpet.

"What did you say?"

Ikutsuki grabbed Akihiko's ankle. "Don't you gimme dat bullssssit!" Pulling down on Akihiko, Ikutsuki rose to his feet. "Dat wass on purpossse!" Rearing a fist back, Ikutski bore down on Akihiko.

"Chairman!" Both Akihiko and Ikutsuki turned to the front door just in time to see Mitsuru entering with her father.

…

Upstairs in the command center, Minato clicked his tongue and put a mark on a sheet on paper. "Looks like Yukari was right. All it took was a few accidents to get him fired."

"Bark!"

Minato shook his head. "I know you were hedging for a legality issue, Koromaru, but I am not going to be the guy who laced his villain's cereal with heroin. Where would I even get that stuff?"

"Bark! Bark-bark!"

"...I'm going to ignore that you know about those sorts of places, Koro."

"Bark bark bark!"

[Nocturne], [SMT IV], [Devil Survivor 1], [Predator], [Bar Loop]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27
Status: NON-CANON? (it is illegal to directly include Archie characters in fanfiction due to company copyright demand, though apparently references to the comic are fine)

"You truly plan to do this?" Kashima asked, as he and the blue-haired boy sat aside from each other.

"Look, maybe the Great Will *does* need to go once the Loops end," Kazyua replied. " Or at least, the version from the main Branches. But *Lucifer* needs to get axed, too."

"You can do whatever you please once the Loops end," the Demi-Fiend said, trying to ignore Naoki yelling at them to just settle this damn argument, they'd been at it for *hours*. "Whether or not you *can* defeat him-"

"That's now what this is about," the King of Bel retorted, scowling. "We know that you, me, and the rest of the Anchors are gonna head out and wipe out both of those bastards once all this is over.

"But what happens after that?" he asked, leaning in closer. "Are you going to try and conquer the omniverse? Do what Naoya wanted, and try to *break* everything down?"

"I fail to see how that is a problem," Kashima said, idly toying with his chopsticks. "Once the shackles of eternity are loosed, should we not be free to act as we wish? Why do you bother to uphold order, when we have been locked in the same routine for eons on end?"

"Because there are still *so* many problems out there. You think the Admins will fix every Loop at once?" The other Looper shook his head. "No. They're going to have to put it

together, one piece at a time. The MLEs, Wily, the *Flaw?"* The blue-haired boy noted how both Naoki *and* Kashima flinched at the mention of the latter. "Still going to be there. And we need to fix those. Flynn's with me. Saiduq'll probably with me. But you? Langdon? Slaanesh? *Aleph*? Both of us are building armies, for the end of this all. We need to know for *sure* we won't end up on opposite sides of this war, once it starts."

"Gentlemen."

The two demons looked up to see an annoyed Isabeau standing at the edge of the table, a tray of food in her hands.

"I thought I would let you know that the line for ramen is now shorter," she announced, as she sat down next to Kazuya. "And we should save this discussion for when more of us are present."

"Bah." Sighing, Kashima decided to relent for now, as Kazuya excused himself and rose to get in line for some noodles. "Fine."

"Honestly," the Samurai sighed, stirring a packet of sugar into her coffee, "shouldn't we save this for when the Loops actually *end*? We don't need this specter hanging over our heads. We have enough albatrosses as is."

"It never hurts to plan ahea-*fine*," the Demi-Fiend hissed, as Isabeau narrowed her eyes and reached menacingly towards her phone. "We'l discuss this later. *Much* la-"

Their conversation was interrupted when the window crashed open, and an armored figure landed right on top of Kazuya.

Beyond the initial shock and panic, people shows surprisingly little reaction to the seven foot-tall armored, masked figure slowly staggered off of the winded King of Bel, and limped over to Kashima and Isabeau's table. Probably due to the convention just a few blocks from the ramen bar.

Or maybe it had more to do with Atsuro deciding to enact his Silent Revolution this Loop, and people being used to seeing demons walking the streets now. Whatever.

Oh, it's Scarface, Naoki noted as the Predator slammed into Kazyua's seat, while its former occupant dusted himself off and glared at him. *'Sup*?

"**Booze,"** the extraterrestrial begged. Reaching forwards, he yanked a bottle of wine off of the nearby shelf and uncorked it. Tearing his mask off, he removed the cork with his claw and tried to drink it, snarling when he realized it was just a decoration and therefore empty. "<u>I need</u> **booze."**

"This is your pupil, Kashima?" she asked, as a concerned waitress tiptoed over to their booth and tried to defuse the manic alien. "He seems a tad...touched."

"He is not normally like this," he agreed, staring as the Predator wrote down a request for potent sake on the back of Isabeau's check. "I haven't seen someone this crazed since...since a

long time. Scarface. What happened?"

"Bad Loop," Scarface moaned, taking deep breaths as he nervously glanced around the restaurant. "What the **fuck** *was up with that* Loop?!"

"I take it you had your first run-in with Doctor Wily?" Isabeau asked, handing the waitress a yen bill for the alcohol and a tip for her trouble. "Or perhaps Dio? Did you perhaps find your way to a 4Kids Loop?"

"**BET-TY**" the alien hissed. "**FUCKING BET-TY!"**

"...The only Betty I know of is Betty Ross," Isabeau mused, subtly moving away her ramen soup from the frenzied Predator. "...No, wait. Wasn't there a Betty in a Western Manga?"

"Archie mother**FUCKING** Andrews," he clarified, shuddering. "I decided to **hunt them,** *because why not?* But she used **some spell** I didn't *know* about, and*...and..."* He shivered. "She **turned me into** her *mate* and *locked me* **in the basement** and did*...it was like* **Sensei's** concubine *Slaanesh* **on crack**! **I am *never* looking at** a textbook the *same way* again!"

Oh, shit, Naoki realized, chuckling in the back of their shared mind. *That Betty chick was in the list of new Loopers in Amano's newsletter. She went full yandere her first few Loops. You* never *go full yandere.*

"Alright, hold a moment," Isabeau said, nimbly ducking under the table to get past Scarface and into the isle. "I shall find Mari and see if she can provide some medicine. Don't hunt anyone while I am gone."

"**BUT-**"

"*Don't even think about it,"* Isabeau said in a low, dangerous tone, hand already reaching towards her cell phone.

"Bad Loop?" Kazuya asked as he retrived his utensils from Scarface's side of the table and sat in the remaining fourth seat.

"Bad Loop," Kashima confirmed, already thinking of asking Slaanesh to take Betty's form when shi was around Scarface to force his pupil to overcome who may have become his personal feared nemesis. "...I wonder if this is in the Hub in any capacity? It would explain...much."

[Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Mass Effect]
Sovereign's New Groove – part 6
Author: Gamerex27

"The Shepherd, who rebelled against all choices. Your-"

Whatever the White was going to say was interrupted by a gunshot to the face, blowing open its skull.

"We don't have *time* to listen to your lecture," Shepard announced, keying in the command to his new Demon Summoning Program to release his demons. "Doesn't matter if you're right or wrong. If you want to kill off humanity, or *any* other race in the galaxy, you'll answer to *me*. I've stopped the Reapers thousands of times. You? You're *nothing*."

"You, who embrace oblivion so much," Death said, materializing in a burst of light and Magnetite. "It it time to send you to the void you seek. *Die*."

The bloodless, gore-less would closed itself in seconds, as the White narrowed its eyes. Waving its hand, the aura around it shimmered, and the swarm of bullets Shepard unleashed from his SMG bounced off of the barrier and rocketed back towards the party. The bullets drained all of Shepard's shields. In lieu of a convenient chest-high wall to take cover behind, Shepard broke into a sprint, recalling the basic tactic of a moving target being hard to hit.

"*You, who have battled death time and time again,*" the mockery of Anderson asked, in a twisted echo of his baritone voice. "For whom do you fight this hopeless battle?"

"For *everyone*." Charging forwards again, Shepard reappeared behind the White, pointed his gun at the back of its skull, and open fired until the clip ran burning hot. "To save them from *you.* Which we just did."

Shepard stepped over its corpse, but paused. "Better make sure that-"

"It is *not dead!*" Death warned, even as the White sprang to its feet, its head reforming again, and blasted Shepard high into the air with a single spell.

Batting Matador and Death aside, it short-circuted Nihlus's weapon with a single blast of electricity, strolling forwards as Shepard painfully landed on the ground. As he pushed himself to his knees, he came face to face with the White's outstretched palm, shining with an ominous light...

...

In another corner of the Monochrome forest, an ear-piercing battle cry sounded repeatedly. While it was mostly gibberish, one word was intelligible, in incredibly loud Japanese and repeated ad naseum,

"DIE! DIE! DIE! DIE!"

"Holy *shit*," the Hell Biker muttered, as Naoki continued to hammer away at White Yuko with no signs of stopping. "I thought *War* was brutal. He's hammering her faster than she can grow back."

"Um...should we *do* anything, Mister Trumpeter?" Alice asked, yawning. "He's doing it all for us! It's *booooring*!"

"It appears we may yet have a battle to fight," the last Fiend stated, as shambling piles of ooze and ectoplasm materialized all around them with a wave of White Yuko;s hand (even as

she was getting the tar beaten out of her). "Alice, dear girl, I believe they wish to be your *friends*."

'Really?!" Alice's face instantly brightened, and she grinned with far too many teeth for an ordinary girl to have. "Yay! This'll be *fun*! Hey, Mister...s slimes? Would you pretty please...*die for me?*"

As the human-looking girl inhumanly tore her way through the guts and fluids of the damned, the other Fiends shrugged to one another.

"I don't know how the hell Belial and Nebrios do it," the Hell Biker mused, as he slammed the pedal to the metal and mowed his way through a hundred slimes in one rotation of his infernal engine.

Whatever Trumpeter had said to reply was drowned out by the Demi-Fiend's howls of fury.

He forgoed magic. He put away the spells, the enchantments, and even the simplest of his myriad of destructive spells.

Naoki instead chose to simply beat Yuko's imitation over and over, with his bare hands. While she *was* trying to say something, it was rather difficult to lecture your foe when your jaw was being broken every few seconds.

...

"Does it not hurt to know that you can never save them?" the White taking the shape of Gore taunted, wave after wave of attacks fading into nothingness against its tuxedo.

"*Now* what are you prattling on about?" War snarled, his blade bouncing off of Gore's bald head. Before his horse could leap back to charge again, Gore struck the horse in the leg with a strong kick, sending steed and Rider sprawling to the ground.

"*Zelenin. Jiminez. Gore. Arthur. And those dozens of faceless children of Man who die for you.*"

"Oh, *shut up!*" Langdon roared, switching to wind rounds on one of his many guns. These, at last, seemed to cause some lasting damage on the White, who stumbled backwards, riddled with holes.

"These are your comerades. Your friends. And yet, nothing you have done across endless cycles of time has saved them. Each and every Loop, you see them die."

"Death is an inevitability all things reach," Famine hissed, ripping the energy from the White's being with a volley of vampiric curses. "Be it through by blade, by disease, by me, by any of my brothers-"

"-It is inevitable that all things fall," Pestilence concluded, enchanting his arrows with lightning as they *finally* struck true.

"**I'm not talking to you!**" the White shrieked, its monotone of flanging voices briefly switching to Commander Gore's intimidating tone. Smashing them aside with a burst of almighty energy, the duplicate of Gore shot a bolt of flame into Langdon's gun. The gunpowder in the weapon, ignited by magic, exploded in his hands, and only the DEMONICA stopped the soldier from being vaporized on the spot.

As he slid backwards from the force of the explosion, Langdon got to his feet, and drew the blade at his side.

"*Fate itself rebells against you, Son of Man,*" the White continued. "*Regardless of what you do, you can never save them all. Nor will you. So why, then, do you fight for such a long-lost cause?*"

Langdon grabbed a rock from his belt, and smashed it to powder against his blade. Shining with more almighty energy, Langdon charged fowards, the newly-enchanted weapon in his hands above his head and ready to swing.

"*Why do you endure this torment of forever?*"

...

"I've changed my mind!" David moaned as he was smashed over the head with his own violin. "Someone, put this song on mute!"

Touching one of the splinters of wood embedded in David's sun-bleached skull, a grand ash tree grew right into his bones, shattering the Fiend into dry, white powder.

"They have never done *this* before!" Isabeau remarked, leading backwards as White Issachar tore the tree out from the ground with a flick of its wrist, sending it hurtling over to its foes.

"They're not holding back any longer!" Flynn shouted, three-fingered hands awkwardly wrapping around his usual gun to fire at their enemy.

"Excellent!" cackled the Whore of Babylon. "*Now* they're making it a party!" Crackling with thunder and raw magic, Mother Harlot struck White Issachar through the very trees he was hurling from the nearby forest, the flying foliage serving to further channel her lightning fury.

"You wish to see stillness so badly? Let us give you that piece in the grave!" With a terrible shriek, Daisoujou sent forth sonic waves that tore through the air, as well as through the White's various enchantments.

"*Look upon my form,*" it said, undaunted. "*It is that of your friend, Issachar. The one who you have eternally failed to save.*"

"Don't you *dare* do this again, you bastard!" Flynn screamed, a sweep of his blade cutting a flying tree in half, even as he returned fire with his pistol.

"*But your eternal failures include more than just him among their ranks. Jonathan. Walter. The entirety of Kiccigiorgi. Those hundreds of souls left behind as Mikado crumbles. The countless who suffer under the rule of Tayama. It matters not what you do: you are powerless*

in these currents of time. It is all for naught. So, you too, shall return to naught. You must realize, it is the only way to escape the Loops."

"Quiet!" Isabeau retorted, blasting away with a swarm of every elemental spell she knew.

"*The Administrators-those who control the Loops-shall never end them,"* White Issachar taunted. "*Your souls and hearts shall be naught but dust by the time they are even close to fixing the universe. So, why then, do you fight the inevitable?"*

Grunting, White Issachar hunched over, as every part of his body shined with energy.

"Oh, damnna-"

Before everything went white, and then very, very still.

"*Why do you continue to bother, in these wretched fates?"*

[Nocturne], [Warhammer 40000]
(no title)
Authors: Gamerex27, Evilhumour

"Naoki," the Chaos God looked at hir personal looping champions with a dried out tone. "I think I can cross out some my usual sex kinks for us to do."

"Oh?" Naoki reared back in surprise, frowning in confusion. "What kinks?"

"S&M, bestiality and necrophilia." Slaanesh said without batting an eye.

"Wait, what?" Naoki was shocked that Slaanesh was putting S&M off the table. "Why?"

"Because I realized I was just beating a dead horse with all my sex kinks." Slaanesh's grin grew as Naoki slowly pieced together the pun and sighed, walking out of the room.

"...Oh *come on*," shi pouted, following him out of the room. "It wasn't *that* bad!" shi continued, as she came up behind the Demi-Fiend.

The chained Eldar running on the hamster wheel in hir mind started sprinting, and hir words caught up with hir memories.

"Oh."

"Yeah."

The two were silent for a while, gazing off the balcony of whichever palace Slaanesh had made this time into the edge of the Eye of Terror.

"Since when have *you* been the one to wallow in self-pity?" she asked, finally breaking the ice. "I mean, *fuck!* The whole reason you went out of your fucking mind is because you *never* talked about that big-ass Flaw fucking things up back home in the *first place*!"

"I'm not-I...I'm *pissed*, not sad."

You still cannot let go of what happened the Loop where you first met? Kashima asked.

"No, it's what *I* did. I made a mistake. A *huge* mistake-that's why I've had, like, *hundreds* of Loopers out to kill me. Because I lost control and broke that Sanctuary."

I still fail to see how such a world could be considered a Sanctuary. Nearly every living thing on the planet thirsts for your blood, and the country they live in is run by a dictator who controls nearly every aspect of life.

"I don't get it either." He snorted. "I don't regret moving past those pale imitations of my old friends. I don't regret moving on and saving our own hide over trying to save a ship sinking into a black hole. But every time someone mentions horses, I remember my Shadow."

He conjured a card from the energy of the Warp, idly toying with the Tower in his hand. "How I lost control. How I got to that point the White said I'd get to. How I *gave in* to that weakness I tried so hard to extinguish. It brings me back to a bad time in my life, and I wanna move on from it. I know you didn't-"

He trailed off as he noticed the tentacles currently attempting to remove his pants.

"Oh, grow a pair," the Prince of Excess muttered, as an unamused Naoki swatted hir limbs away. "You said yourself that you need to move on from all that bad shit, right? Everyone else already *has*. Me, them, and even the *Anathema*, who hold stupid shit like this forever, forgot about that." Shi wisely decided to omit that shi had to lure Leman away from the Eye *again* this Loop, threatening to blow him up and end the Loop early. Or, was the threat to just blow? Eh, didn't matter.

"It ain't gonna go away overnight," Naoki said. His frown slowly vanished. "But it's not about them. It's about my little rampage," (he said, ignoring Kashima mockingly singing their Hub song in the back of their mind), "and how I blamed it all on myself. I thought I was responsible for all my own problems. But the Flaw...that's something out of anyone's control." He smiled. I guess there really is no one to blame but that. Something out of my control...but something I can still move on from. I couldn't stop it, but it couldn't break me. And *whatever* it was, it sure as hell-"

"Glad to hear it!" Slaanesh chirped, smacking Naoki on the ass. "Now, I *was* just kidding about dropping SNM. I know you hate being the sub, so I figured we could bring in a third party for us to-"

"Dibs on that Frydor asshole!" Naoki interrupted, already rushing off to the Materium with a pilfered Amala Network drum.

"Hey, fuck you!" shi complained. "*I* wanted to go to town on him!"

[Devil Survivor 2]
(no title)

Author: Alternis_Alcor (ThanosCradik?)

Daichi had made it to the Festival Gate in Osaka, where they usually had to fight the Fiend Bilikin on Thursday. He and Saiduq were the only ones Awake this time around, and he didn't want to have to deal with this.

He saw an Unawake Hibiki at the entrance, along with Joe and Keita. He decided to keep quite about what they were about to fight. "Hey, guys. So what did Yamato want us to handle?"

"Not sure, but I think that it has to do with this smell."

Now that it was mentioned, Daichi could in fact smell something.

"Holy hell, what is that?"

Joe shrugged, "Dunno, but it smells like a port-a-potty left in the summer for too long."

Just then, several demons burst out of the doors of the Festival Gate, fleeing for their lives and covering their noses.

"The hell? I'm pretty sure that there was a Pazuzu in that group."

Before anyone could reply to Keita, the smell became overbearing as one last demon burst out of the door. It was large, a sickly brown color, and shaped like a foot.

"THAT'S what Yamato wants us to fight!?"

"Hey, isn't that-"

The demon took a deep breath before introducing itself. "**I AM ENIGMA KANBARI, *GOD* OF THE PRIVY!!!**"

"Aw HELL no!" Keita ran after the fleeing demons, hoping to put some distance between him and the new demon. Joe quickly followed.

Hibiki and Daichi shared a quick glance before running after them, the ***GOD* OF THE PRIVY** giving chase.

"**I'LL TEACH YOU LITTLE WHELPS TO SHOW THE PROPER RESPECT FOR THE RESTROOM!!!**"

"CAN THE LOOP PLEASE BE OVER NOW!?!"

[Nocturne], [Winx Club]
(no title)
Author: Awesomedude17

Naoki had already long given up on trying to care about the world, mainly because of the inevitable results of it.

But he was not completely heartless. A pair of visiting Loopers had came, a duo from Alfea, whatever that was.

After slaughtering the opposing forces, he finally noticed arguing coming from the closet. Annoyed, Naoki kicked down the door.

"What are you two doing?"

"She wants to try something possible, but dangerous." Techna said.

"It's the only option we got." Flora yelled back.

"You do realize that I already finished up, right?"

"What." The two said as they rushed out and saw piles of bodies.

"Honestly, I'd rather you not bicker, since this is only phase one."

The duo looked crestfallen after that line.

[Devil Survivor 1], [Devil Survivor 2]
That time when a hikikomori spam mails a weird app to everyone (title assigned by compiler) – part 1
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Atsuro glanced at his COMP to check the time, seeing that there was still some time left until the Lockdown. Sometimes he felt like he could time everything that happens down to the second with the way they proceeded. ‘Course, everytime he tried to do so happened to be some kind of odd variant.

Like this time. There was an odd application on his COMP that wasn’t there not even two hours ago. He had been trying to see if he could crack its code for a while, even trying to hack into its server, but it was like something was actively countering his attempts.

“Hey, Atsuro! How’s it going?”

Looking up, Atsuro saw Kazuya walking towards him. He had checked beforehand and found that all three of them were Awake.

“Hey, pretty good! Where’s Yoo-hoo?”

His answer came with a slap upside his head. “Will you quit calling me that already?” Her own answer was a chuckle.

With both of his friends and fellow Loopers here now he decided to show them what he had found.

“Hey, take a look at this. Either of you heard of this before?”

He handed his COMP to Kazuya, who checked out the strange application.

“‘Nicaea’? Dead face delivery? No, it doesn’t ring any bells.”

Yuzu took a look, and shook her head. “Maybe it’s some sort of variant thing this Loop?”

Atsuro took back his COMP, and opened the application. “Whatever it is, I think it’ll reveal what it does soon enough, anyway. That’s always a thing that happens in the Loop, isn’t it? Hey, have either of you seen Naoya, yet?”

“No, and the date is off by a few years, though my memories are telling me that the Lockdown happened. I think this might be a variant or a fused Loop.”

Yuzu looked around. “If that’s the case, then what Loop is this?”

“Well, we won’t find out sitting around here. Let's take a look around and see if we can find anything out.”

As his friends agreed with his idea, Atsuro wondered who they would meet this Loop.

…

(An hour later)

Al Saiduq knew that there wasn’t anything he could do, but Booting up too late to stop Polaris’s plan always did leave him in a dour mood.

Looking out over the ruined city of Tokyo, he pinged and was able to receive several others in return. A quick report from the Ticos informed him that everyone was Awake, but that meant that there were more Loopers according to those extra pings he had felt. One Tico had confirmed that at least two of them had access to Nicaea’s app.

Planning to meet up with these visitors, he was about to leave when he felt the presence of several demons suddenly appear; some who he could recognize, and several others who never appeared during the Loop. They were all weakened, but their similarity worried him, considering that at least one of them had a hate filled presence.

He quickly summoned a new demon, one that rode a large warhorse and was clad in crimson armor.

“Eligor, there is a group of people who I need you to find. Once you do, bring them to the Diet Building where I’ll be waiting for you.”

“At once, Master.”

Having the Ticos guide the demon, Saiduq left to alert the others of the demons who had appeared.

…

“Can we please have a Loop where everything doesn’t all go to hell?”

Atsuro could understand why Yuzu said that. Looking at the devastation around them, he wondered what else would happen.

A sudden gasp of pain brought his attention to Kazuya, who was on the ground.

“Hey, what’s wrong?!” He dropped his COMP as he and Yuzu rushed over to their downed friend.

“Th-the Bel demons are-!?” He couldn’t say any more as several spirits tore their way out of his body, and flew in several directions. Atsuro was instantly checking to see if there was any damage, but it seemed that Kazuya was alright, save for being unconscious.

“What just happened?! Why did the Bel just take off?!”

Turning towards Yuzu, he explained, “I’m not sure, but I think what just happened around here might have something to do with it. There was no way any of this was a natural disaster.” He waved at the ruined city around them for emphasis. “We need to find those other Loopers who are here. They might know something.”

As he went back to pick up his COMP, he noticed that he had some mail. Opening it, the message revealed a video, courtesy of Nicaea.

[Persona 4], [Digital Devil Saga]
Dojima’s Awakening – part 2
Author: LurksHereAndThere

The water crashed against his face. Slowly, deliberately, Ryotaro allowed the droplets to fall for a second before reaching for the towel the Karma Temple Guard offered him.

The meeting had been a disaster. It had begun when he and the other Tribe Leaders all gathered in the Temple’s core. There had been the usual exchange of insults and banter as each Leader occupied their rightful place at the audience hall, until only two spaces remained empty: the Investigators’ and the Vanguards’. And then the Investigator Leader had sauntered in. Silver hair. Matching eyes. The standard orange mark of his Tribe. Nothing special. Ryotaro had felt nothing, even when the young man’s gaze had wandered and eye contact had been briefly made. The demon, however, had been another story entirely, furiously howling in his mind, reminding Ryotaro of the visions they’d seen in dreams, alternatively threatening, begging and demanding a truth the Hunter could not give.

The Vanguards’ destruction had been mentioned and discarded in the same breath. Then, as the damnable Dissemination Machine claimed there were no pressing issues, its interfaces convulsed in agony, and Angel had made her appearance. Proudly, she revealed the truth of their Karma and their Atma, of how the demons that they were and always had been had now

been unleashed. Of how they were now expected to bleed and die by monsters and as monsters if they ever wanted to open the gates of Nirvana.

Jinana, Manipura's Leader, had exploded in furious threats and demands to stop the Atma, and Namatame, Lord of Anahata, collapsed, almost pounding at the exit while sobbing for his Tribe. The Investigator had started demanding explanations. Alone amongst them, the Hunter leader's attention darted back and forth from his four peers and the Temple's new mistress.

It was then that Ryotaro saw it – the Phantoms' Leader's eye. Even at a distance, Ryotaro could see the grey orb blossom into an impossible rainbow ring as Angel passionately proclaim the new condition any would-be victors would have to fulfil in order to open the gates of Nirvana. Slowly, the expression in the Phantom's eye relaxed, following Angel's voice, losing whatever defiance she possessed. She gently bowed, the Atma mark in her forehead igniting with a dull bronze light.

For some godforsaken (another word whose origins he could not place) reason, the Investigator's prodding questions had prompted a furious response from Angel, violently disconnecting her from the Machine, who'd immediately tried to get back to business by acknowledging everything – Atma, Angel's changes, their new orders – with an astonishing levity. Namatame had run away from Sahasrara like a scared dog. Off to brick himself shut in Ahanata, most likely. The Phantom had wordlessly left. Jinana had briefly tried to engage a group of Temple Guards before being unceremoniously knocked out and packed into a jeep bound for Manipura. Ryotaro wished he'd been there. If nothing else, he'd have joined the lady.

That left him and the Investigator.

"Are you ready to depart, Ryotaro of the Hunters?"

Tossing the wet towel at the irritating white figure, Ryotaro leveled his gaze at the metallic visor. "What the hell is this all about?"

"I do not comprehend."

The Temple Guard barely had responded when Ryotaro's fist smashed the front plate of the ornate helmet. Staggering, the Guard wobbled backwards for several steps before regaining footing, hands pressing at the helmet. Slowly, deliberately, the Hunter approached the white giant, and in a brutal move, grabbed the thickly armored throat, and pressed, bringing his foe to his knees.

"There's a limit to the crap I can stomach, Guard. This isn't-can't possibly be-the Temple's goal! This cannot possibly be the way to Nirvana! Who or what is Angel and what does she want?"

Even as the gorget bent around his foe's fingers, the Guard responded with an open-palm strike at this opponent's midsection, which was not enough to make Ryotaro release him. Gathering green energy in his palm for a second strike, the Guard slammed the tip of his outstretched hand against the Hunter's shoulder. The impact tore the entire shoulder guard to pieces and shattered Ryotaro's clavicle. With a lightning-fast uppercut to the Hunter's jaw,

the tables were definitely turned in favor of the white monster. Ryotaro crashed against the wall, hissing as the Guard approached in complete silence. Energy gathered around his mark, the burning sun in his shoulder, as the demon was granted the chance to slip its chains with no resistance. And then casually, dismissively, the Guard released a quick pulse with a wave of his hand, and the demon was dragged back, howling and screaming, into the depths of the Hunter's mind. What on Earth…?

"The Karma Temple has been informed of this assault. You are to be removed from Sahasrara immediately and return to Vishuddha. A demerit has been added to your service records. Failure to comply will result in further demerits and possible demotion. You will now be-"

BZZAZAAP!

It happened so fast Ryotaro didn't even see the lightning until it was already arcing through the Guard's armor. As the brute painfully convulsed, a long, thin mass cleanly punched through his throat. With a flick, the Guard was tossed like a ragdoll, crashing against the nearest wall. Blinking away tears, the Hunter struggled to rise. Painfully panting, he glared at the approaching Investigator and the outstretched hand as he nursed his shoulder.

"You okay?"

Ryotaro scowled at the Investigator as he forced down a Hero Ration bar and swat away the offered hand. Interestingly, the Investigator actually seemed affected by the glare. "I'm fine. What do you want, Narukami of the Investigators?"

The boy paused for a moment, as if to weigh his words. "Back there, in the audience hall, you were pretty quiet."

"Between Jinana and you there was very little left to say."

The kid was nervous. Ryotaro granted him, he was pretty slick, dominated his emotions admirably. But the Hunters prided themselves in good senses. And right now, the Investigator exuded the faint but unmistakable aroma of fear. Time to press him. Every incautious word was gold for both the Hunters and the demon.

"You didn't answer my question. What is it that you want?"

Narukami blinked. "I wanted to know what is it that you think of Angel and the Atma." Then, he had the gall to actually smile, glancing at the dead Temple Guard. "Looks like I didn't even have to ask." The smile faded. "What would you give for the truth, Ryotaro of the Hunters?"

Ohh, the kid was good. The demon perked at that, shaking off the effects of whatever contrivance the Guard had used. "The truth of what?"

The Investigator swept his arm, gesturing at the vastness of the Temple. "Nirvana. The Junkyard. Angel. Atma. Everything, really."

Ryotaro snorted. "A lot. Not everything. What's the asking price?"

“Alliance with the Investigators. We want to storm open the gates of Nirvana, while saving as many as we can. The Temple’s orders will only bring death and destruction, and thus we’ve chosen to defy them.”

Silence hung heavily for a moment. Then, the Hunter chuckled. Slowly, it rose in intensity, first to a guttural laugh, then to a full guffaw. Grinning ferociously, Ryotaro felt the sun burn in his shoulder, and started releasing the chains holding back the monster. Not all the way, of course. Just enough for what needed to be done. The flesh and bone of his arm twisted, shifting into cracked obsidian plates holding impossibly solid fire in place. The creeping crystal veins rapidly engulfed his hand, forming a spiky mass topped by sharp, thin claws. “Pretty words. And yet, you have no issues with killing, I see?”

The stench of fear was rising. But the Investigator kept his ground. He walked slowly and deliberately to the fallen Guard, and invoked the strength of his own Atma. Ryotaro’s eyes widened when he understood what he was going to do.

With a swift jerk, the kid cracked the remains of the monster’s neck and messily tore his head off.

Black blood sputtered in great gushes from the wound. But no, no, it wasn’t blood at all…

It was oil.

Narukami, his expression completely neutral, rose to his feet, carrying the head, and showed Ryotaro whatever passed for the neck. There was very little to see and even less the Hunter could understand. Even so, it was difficult to misinterpret the broken servo motors and crackling circuitry. The Investigator dropped the machine’s head, the noisy clatter echoing across the hall.

The boy was very, very afraid. And all of a sudden Ryotaro wasn’t sure of what.

Hesitatingly, Narukami spoke. “There’s a lot you don’t know, Hunter. I can tell you everything you want, but you have to trust me.”

The Hunter ground his teeth. The demon snarled, hammering at Ryotaro's mental walls. The Investigator was taunting him, and his patience and willingness to talk was slowly but surely eroding. Soon he wouldn't even have the will to keep the monster leashed. Bitterly, the older man chuckled. What the hell. Why wait? The Investigator was distracted, focusing in maintaining eye contact with Ryotaro without really observing his posture. Bad move.

He charged. The great obsidian claw crashed against the boy's granite spear. Taking advantage of the kid's surprise, Ryotaro kicked his shin, breaking his balance. Swatting the grey stone spear away, he slammed the Investigator by the throat against the wall with his normal hand, and roared in his face: "You cannot possibly expect me to place my life and my tribesmen's in your hands without proof, Investigator!"

Barely managing to force air into his lungs, the Investigator whispered: "And I can't give you everything. Not without an understanding." Swallowing with some difficulty, he continued. "But I can give you something to think about. Please... just... just hear me out!"

Ryotaro's voice was steel and ice, a feral smile drawing upon his features. "I'm listening."

Narukami's expression was filled with pain this time. And there was no fear. "Does the word *Yasoinaba* mean anything to you?"

It didn't. Not to Ryotaro. But to his surprise, the demon's fury vanished. His own wrath faded like smoke in the wind. Gingerly, he removed the pressure on the Investigator's neck and released him, as the stone arm softened into flesh and bone once more. The Hunter had no idea of why he was doing so, but... it seemed correct. Natural. Inwardly, he sighed. More strange things to explain. Fantastic. He'd had about just enough of games for a single day. Turning around, he grabbed the broken machine's head and hefted its body in a fireman's carry. The engineers at Vishuddha would have quite a lot to play with. He himself had acquired a piece of the puzzle, enough to keep the demon at bay, and quite a bit more besides. He could probably force more out of the Investigator, but...

"Get out. The Gua... machines, they're coming, and I don't have the time to kill you properly. Thanks for the tidbit. Whatever it means."

As he left for the nearest exit, Ryotaro remembered something else. Smirking, he finished: "Oh, and please don't act like your shit don't stink, son. It was the Hunters who absorbed the remains of Svadhisthana's forces after the bloodbath there. Kind of mixed signals you're sending, preaching you want to save everyone after *that*."

Ryotaro was pleased to see Narukami open and close his mouth in outright astonishment. Like a fish out of water. Something to remind him he'd had the last word.

...damn, another one of those turns of phrase.

...

Privately, the Investigator sighed and cursed himself. He'd been so enthusiastic over the idea that his Uncle might be Looping, he'd blundered into the situation like an amateur. And what was worse, he'd left without really working out what was wrong with the man. Dojima hadn't recognized him and he'd seldom seen such wrath coming from him (not withstanding those frankly odious Variants when he was the murderer), but to be perfectly honest, Narukami admitted he'd tried reaching the Hunter as if he were his Uncle, offering him the truth he so wanted in Inaba in exchange for some trust. *Stupid*, he chided himself. In the Junkyard, trust was a priceless resource almost only found within one's Tribe. What was he thinking, dangling forbidden knowledge before a man that believed him to be a mortal enemy?

Strangest of all, Ryotaro *did* stop at the mention of Yasoinaba. Rubbing his throat, Narukami decided to talk to Gale and Sera as soon as he made it back to the Investigator base. Gale was the one that knew the person his Uncle had replaced the best. And Sera could fill him in about Svadhisthana, which was supposed to have been taken near-bloodlessly.

Damn. *What do I do now?*

[Strange Journey], [Halo]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

"...What is he *doing*?" Cortana asked as John gunned down another gaggle of Grunts on the Pillar of Autumn.

"...no idea," the SPARTAN in golden armor said, tossing a perfectly working shotgun to the ground from nowhere.

"No idea," Chief said, tossing a plasma grenade right into the mouth of a charging Elite. Right where Chief knew he would be, after around a thousand times through this corridor.

"Too small," the the other SPARTAN commented as he chucked a missile launcher to the side, the impact on the ground setting it off and launching a missile right into the face of an unfortunate Jackal. "Too *big*, don't have the room for that," he continued, lowering the tiny (for a SPARTAN) pistol marked SEES and dropping it back into nowhere. "No *ammo* for this...waiiiit," he he said, lifting what appeared to be a mutilated *vacuum cleaner* back into the air. "Chief! Toss me a Grunt!"

"Wait, *what*?" Cortana exclaimed as Chief yanked a half-dead Grunt off of the floor at his feet and tossed it to the other human.

"I want to see where he's going with this," he explained. "Elite, two o'clock!"

"Got it!" his companion exclaimed, somehow managing to stuff the alien's entire lower half into the loading bay. "OORAH!"

Pulling the trigger, the Rock-It Launcher propelled the screaming Grunt through the air at speeds that should have been impossible. Right before he hit a pair of Hunters, the plasma grenade the stranger had covertly attached to it detonated, blowing the last of the Covenant wave sky-high.

"That the last of them?" he asked, picking up his bevy of discarded weapons and stuffing them back into what Chief realized must have been his Pocket.

"Yeah." A memory dimly stuck the Master Chief. The gold armor and red visor was very similar to the description of someone Shepard had mentioned back when she had explained what the hell was going on with time. "Langdon?"

"Nice to meet you too,", the other man replied. "Now that we have a chance to talk after Waking Up...I have to say, I may have been looking forward to this Loop a little. So long as we don't run into any tweens screaming awful slurs through the ship's intercom."

"Warn me if you see them," Chief responded, physically fighting back the urge to roll his eyes. "I'll explain later," he added, shutting down Cortana's pre-emptive question. "You ready to-"

"HERETIC!" a faint voice cried from somewhere farther away, on the Halo itself.

"NO, *THOU ART* A HERETIC!"

Gunfire and explosions sounded in the distance, as another skirmish started up somewhere closer to the entrance of the wrecked ship.

"Oh, *damnit.* I can never go anywhere without *them* showing up, can it?" He picked up a dropped sniper rifle, and peered trough the scope at a convenient breach in the hull looking out onto the world-ring. "Yeah," he sighed, "it's them."

Chief crossed the hallway, and stared out the hole with his fellow Anchor.

For a few seconds, they just stared at the gaggle of winged, white-robed figures fighting and trading religious accuations of heresy at yet another squadron of Covenant.

"Huh," Cortana mused, as she set Chief's armor computer to record, absentmindedly thinking of which humorous song to sync over the angels' fight. "I guess the Halo *is* God's own anti son of a bitch machine."

[Persona 3], [My Little Pony]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex2

"That *can't* be the right bill."

"I assure you, it is."

"That's missing...a couple of zeroes, I think?"

"Akihiko-san, bits are worth more than yen. The exchange rate is approximately 1:100."

"Trust me, it's quite alright. Element of Generosity, remember? I wouldn't be a very good one of I didn't give discounts to my friends!"

"Regardless of the price, this is incredible work, Rarity-san," Mitsuru said, stepping back towards the mirror and admiring the dress she'd got from Rarity for the upcoming trial. "*C'est magnifique!*"

"Oh? Vous pouvez parler français?" Rarity asked, smile widening. "C'est bien?"

"...I beg your pardon?" Mitsuru asked, blinking.

"...Il est utile de savoir parler des langues differentes," Rarity elaborated, "particulièrement aprés le Réviser. Nous allons d'autre Loops souvent, oui?"

Mitsuru did not answer.

"...do you really know French, dear, or do you only know a few words?" Rarity asked, switching back to Equestrian.

"We should go now," Mitsuru said. "The trial will start soon."

"It's nothing to be ashamed about!" Rarity tried to say, as an increasingly red-faced Mitsuru trotted out the boutique's door. "I'd teach you, if the Loop didn't end tomorrow! Maybe next time?"

"...she doesn't actually know French?" Minato asked, glancing back at his companions. "Did you guys know this?"

"I never asked," Akihiko muttered, shrugging.

"Neither did you," Aigis added. "Had you payed attention, it would have been clear that Mitsuru-san only used a set of stock French phrases. I guess no one thought to ask."

They were interrupted by a faint cry of someone complaining about how that can't stretch like that, vaguely in the direction of the castle.

"We should probably get this over with before Ryoji ends up melting her brain."

...

"All rise for the honerable Judge Ivory Scroll."

"'Judge' Ivory Scroll?" Rarity whispered as everypony in the courtroom rose to their hooves.

"She wanted to try something new this Loop," Twilight elaborated.

"You may be seated." Ignoring how Starlight Glimmer's body briefly spasmed over in the accused's seat, the mare in the wig cleared her throat. "Now, let's begin. Mister...Midnight Peaches, correct?"

"That's right," Ryoji said, deciding to answer to the Equestrian name he often used when swapping places with Nyx Sparkle.

"Would you be able to allow the accused control over her mouth for some intervals so she may answer the court's questions?"

"Um..." The Appriser of Nyx shifted his gaze around the room. "She's...kinda distracted. My mind's not the neatest place, and she found some...uh...private stuff that she's still complaining about."

"We're all grown ponies, Mr. Peaches," Ivory Scroll replied. "So long as nothing gets too out of hoof, I will not punish you for something beyond your control.

"Now," she continued, glancing at the list of charges again and cringing. "Starlight Glimmer, you stand accused of mass violation of equine rights, usage of banned mind-altering magic, imprisoning and assaulting a Princess, and real estate fraud. How do you plead?"

"THAT'S CAN'T BEND THAT WAY!"

Everypony in the courtroom stared at Starlight once she'd regained control of her mouth.

"...guilty or not guilty, miss Glimmer?" the judge asked, after a few moments of regaining her composure.

"Not guilty," the deposed tyrant sighed. "Can I at least get a cold shower before we begin this...kangeroo court?"

"We showered just this morning!" Ryoji objected. "I even made sure to keep your-my, whatever-eyes closed!"

"That did NOT help at all, you...you *pervert!*" the body's true owner hissed. "I did *not* want to see those hairless minotaurs doing-"

"That's enough, please."

After the lawyers made their statements, Ivory decided to start at a common place during such proceedings: witness testimonies.

"The court calls Great Seal to the stand."

Nodding, Minato cantered over to the witness's podium and looked up at Ivory. "Where should I start?"

"The beginning, please."

"Alright," he said. "So, we all went to her town to see what the magic map said was going on." He paused briefly, still unused to the fact that such a sentence was not only accepted, but *uncontested* in a court of law. "The town was filled with all of these ponies with the same Cutie Mark. We did some digging, and it turns out that she stole all their original Cutie Marks, an-"

The rest of Minato's sentence was cut off by an uproar from the jury bench. Overdramatic gasps of horror rang out from those drafted to stand judgement over this case, with a few ponies fainting.

"Order! Order in the court!" Ivory yelled, banging her gavel after a few seconds of horror. "Mister Seal, how would that even *work*? Those who have been drained of all magic-including the kind that ties into Cutie Marks-did not lose them all together."

"I...think it was *her* talent."

"...her special talent was to take others' talents away?" Ivory asked incredulously.

"...It looked that way."

"...please continue."

"Thanks. So, she brought us into a trap, and sucked away our Cutie Marks. But she ignored what *my* Mark meant. She took it off, and, well, ended up getting hoist by her own petard."

"Your own Mark." The other Looper frowned. "Please take your clothes off."

"*What*?!" Minato exclaimed, his mask of calmness briefly shattering into total confusion.

"...the court orders you to get naked?"

"I...um..." Blushing, Minato looked around the courtroom, noticing that several jury members and the bailiff were nude. Slowly, he doffed the suit Rarity had stitched for him, and awkwardly turned his flanks to the judge, silently praying that Aigis wasn't recording all of this.

"A shield and rosary. I see." Ivory Scroll adjusted her glasses. "If I understand it correctly, your Mark signified how you held away Mr. Peaches-that is to say, Death-from the world to protect all of ponykind. And removing that rendered you unable to seal him away?"

"Objection!" yelled the defending lawyer. "This is in no way relevant to the case!"

"Overruled," she replied. "We need to know exactly what happened and how, so we can see if the accusations are valid or not. That will be all for now, Mr. Seal."

Miscellaneous 14

[SMT IV], [Naruto]
In which Yuriko is Outfoxed
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Flynn stood in front of the monument where the epigraph detailed the rise of the Eastern Kingdom of Mikado. Walter asked, "Oy, what's the matter? you look like that time we had to save Navarre from that legion of Pixies."

Flynn was not awake at that time. He had awoken shortly after Navarre had been rescued. Isabeau, on the other hand, had been awake, and eliminated Aluraune, replacing the demon with a swarm of her own. Upon reflection, the Pixies had been hilarious, seeing Navarre running from the Pixies. Further, his fate was kinder this time, as he was discharged with his mind intact as opposed to during the baseline.

No, what got Flynn so annoyed was the Obelisk Chronicling the rise of King Uzumaki, who freed the people from the demons and sealed the entrance to hell below. He could only imagine what he would soon be facing at the doors to Tokyo.

…

Flynn sighed as he stood in a much larger cavern, containing a massive, sleeping Nine tailed fox...or had been sleeping until their arrival awoke it from its ancient slumber.

"Who dares intrude upon my resting grounds. You have awoken me from my ancient slumber. Not even an anchor could keep you from being blown away by my fury at this point!"

Flynn sent out a ping, hoping against hope he was right. The fox turned his head at the ping, then focused on the four of them. Isabeau approached. "Calm your fury, my lord. We seek the Black Samurai who passed through not too long ago. We may have Looped around a time or two and gotten lost. Please direct us in the right way."

The fox seemed to tilt his head. The barked a laugh which knocked over Jonathan and Walter. "Hah! So, you and your friend there?! Very well. The Black Samurai did pass through a fortnight ago."

Isabeau helped Jonathan to his feet, and Flynn the same to Walter. The male looper said, "Perhaps I could stay behind and inquire a few questions, my lord?"

The fox rolled his eyes. "Such stuffy language. Naruto was far more relaxed. Stay if you so like. But don't take up too much of my time."

Isabeau nodded and took Walter and Jonathan ahead. As soon as the doors closed, Kurama started laughing. "*King* Uzumaki. Naruto having to dress in those fancy outfits, he wouldn't have stood for it."

Flynn gave a small bow. "Kurama, would you like to leave this place? Join me as my demon as opposed to being trapped in a small cavern and sleeping all the time?"

Kurama's grin turned feral, "You must give me something of equal value to have me as yours. Give me all your macca!"

The demon fox then circled around the man, who flinched. "Oh God. I mugged you sometime, didn't I?"

He smirked. "If you had, you would not survive that following five seconds. Ok, you don't have to give me all your macca. Let's start with...your gauntlet?"

And thus, the negotiations began, but would eventually end with Kurama signing on. The sight on Yuriko's face when suddenly facing down an oversized demon fox was almost worth the price he paid.

[Persona 4], [Gundam]
Kira Yamato's Design – part 7
Author: Drakohahn

The brown-haired, violet-eyed young man felt the pain go away and his energy return when his Shadow Self was defeated. Kira pushed himself back to a standing position, though it took a bit of effort to do so.

"Hey, you okay?" Yosuke asked the visiting Looper, walking over to provide a body in case he needed support.

"That... was a sensation I hope to never experience again," was Kira's response as he took deep breaths to recover.

"Yeah, when your Shadow Self runs wild," Kanji agreed while the rest of the Investigation Team walked over to join Yosuke with the visitor. "That feeling like what makes you you is being pulled out and suddenly you got no energy to do anything. Pretty much all of us have experienced that."

"This is your normal, huh?" Kira mused. "Well, at least I'm Awake."

"Everyone's Loopy here, so you're among friends!" Teddie, the dumpy blue bear stated.

"Oh!" Yukiko realized suddenly. "We haven't properly introduced ourselves. My name is Yukiko Amagi. Pleasure making your acquaintance."

She gave a bow with her introduction and each member at least nodded with theirs in turn.

"I'm Chie Satonaka."

"Naoto Shirogane."

"Rise Kujikawa."

"Name's Kanji Tatsumi."

"I'm Teddie."

"I'm Yosuke Hanamura."

"And I'm Yu Narukami."

Kira had nodded back in turn with each name.

"My baseline name is Kira Yamato, but I'm fine with Kira Hibiki too."

Before anyone could ask about that or why he was here in the Midnight Channel, his Shadow Self roused and stood up. Unlike when he was confronting it, the golden-eyed double looked slightly apprehensive as it stared at the original. Kira noticed his other get up and frowned, which caused the others to notice as well.

"Kira," Yu started to get his attention. When the violet-eyed young man looked at him, he continued. "That is your Shadow, the deepest parts of yourself that you don't want to acknowledge. Everyone has a Shadow. As you saw, if they're rejected, they get violent and try to replace the original. So, what are you going to do?"

The visiting young man tensed up at the explanation, but forced himself to relax with a sigh. Striding passed everyone to confront his Shadow, Kira's expression became serious.

"This place was where I learned a terrible truth about myself," He started as he walked. "A truth I learned from a madman that wanted to kill off all of humanity. In my baseline, there are genetically enhanced humans called Coordinators. However, there was some flaws in the process which sometimes meant that the resulting child wasn't what the parents wanted. To that end, my father and his team were tasked with finding a solution to those flaws."

The Investigation Team listened silently as he got closer with each word and step to his Shadow.

"Eventually, my father determined that there were too many variables to deal with by having the mother give natural birth. So, he and his team set out to make an artificial womb to cut out those variables. There were many failures, many losses of unborn life, in trying to complete this project."

He stopped outside of arms reach from his other self.

"The team didn't have the funding to make the final step they needed to finish the device and were being threatened with cancellation as a result. So to get the necessary funding, my father made a reluctant deal with one of the backers to make a clone for the man. Cloning was illegal at the time, but it was either take the deal or allow everything the project did up to then go to waste."

Kira clenched his right hand into a fist for a moment.

"With that boost to their funding, they got what they needed to work out the flaws of their device. And to complete their proof of concept, my father used me as the final test subject. However, my enhancements were to be the limit of what they could do with the new technology they had; an Ultimate Coordinator."

Behind him, the Investigation Team reacted in horror and shock, taking half steps back and/or covering their mouths with their hands. Then Kira relaxed his hand.

"But, I don't hate my father. Yes, he did questionable things, but if he was truly so bad, then why do those pictures of my mother holding me and my twin sister so soon after birth exist? And she was smiling... I'm actually kind of saddened that I didn't get to know my birth parents at all."

He sighed again, slumping his shoulders a bit in misery.

"But after learning of what I truly was, I locked it away in my mind. I tried to act like it hadn't happened, not even telling my sister. Even as more enemies appeared who knew what I was, I remained quiet about the issue to those close to me."

Then he straightened up once more and took those last steps to his Shadow.

"So, first thing I do when I have the chance is to tell everyone back home. It won't make a difference to them, but it's something I have to admit to."

He placed a hand on the Shadow's shoulder.

"I'm sorry for reacting so badly to you and thanks for giving me this kick in the ass I needed. You are me."

The Shadow smiled slightly and nodded his head. It glowed and faded to a different appearance; briefly revealing a svelte man with polished bronze skin in an elaborate white and red silk kimono and birdlike wings the color of silver. Then he vanished and was replaced by a glowing blue card.

Kira Yamato has faced his other self. He obtained the facade used to overcome life's hardships; the Persona Jizo.

The brown-haired young man inhaled and exhaled deeply.

"Feeling better?"

He looked over at the Investigation Team; specifically the speaker, Yu. He smiled in response.

Walking over to the group, Kira asked, "So, what's there to do in this Loop?"

They all started walking away while discussing plans for their time together.

[Digital Devil Saga], [Warhammer 40000]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

Bored, Tzeentch flipped through a haphazard binder of various plots (one of a set of thousands, this being the first volume of a few dozen for his home universe).

He frowned with both mouths. He had gone through *every* plot in this one. From the ruinous plots like those he had been pulling since Baseline (which had diminished, but not totally stopped, since doing new things all the time got old fast) to less world-shattering shenanigans like black faxing the entirety of Holy Terra to ensure they would have no way to communicate or create petitions while he redecorated the entire star system.

Perhaps covering the homeworld's moon in grafitti was a bit lazy, and he *did* find reducing the ten planets to a much more pleasing nine wasn't as satisfying as it should have been-mainly since Pluto had lost the planet status it had spent millenia trying to regain when the Anathema emerged to lead humanity. Although it *did* work nicely as the sphere in his ballpoint pen.

He was interrupted from considering how he could adapt that one love story from Verona to use humans and Necron (live action, of course) by the sounds of intense vomiting several indescriable lengths of distance across the Warp.

"Damnit, Nurgle," he hissed, travelling entire lengths of galaxies in the blink of an eye, emerging inside the plague god's garden. "I'm *plotting* here!"

"Oh, I'm *sorry*," the bloated mass of decay muttered, rolling his perpetually swollen eyes. "I was just helping Khorne with *my* specialty, too!"

"Wait, Khorne? Why is *he* here?"

The deities' conversation was interrupted by more retching from a conveniently placed outhouse in the corner of the garden.

"Hang on," Nurgle said, grabbing the septic tank with a tentacle and yanking it out in one deft motion. "Hm...bile, always nice, infectious enough..blood, naturally, with some kind of virus I haven't seen (yay!)-probably caused the vomiting....ooooh, human flesh! Teeth, too!" he slurped excitedly. "Tzeentch, do you know how *many* diseases can be found in the human mouth! It's like a scale model of my entire realm!"

"Don't change the subject!" snapped the Lord of Change. "Why is he vomiting in the first place, if he drank blood?! When has he *ever* found blood disgusting enough to barf it up?"

"Since around an hour ago."

Tzeentch turned to see a being, no larger than a normal human, sitting cross-legged underneath a tree made of tumors. They looked like a human mutant at first glance: the evenly split black and silver hair colors weren't natural, and the shape of their clothing made them more akin to Slaanesh's preferred body than a man or woman.

But the dual-layered, echoing voices and the *power* that poured off of hir gave it away. This was not a human being-at least, not entirely.

"My name is Seraph," shi said, rising and floating across the ground to the gods. "Khorne challenged me to a duel when he found me defending the weak from his daemons. I...was pre-occupied at the time, and lost," shi said, frowning. "He tried to take his trophy from me, but he only got to spilling a few drops of my blood before he began to...I am unsure how to describe it."

More wretching.

"Perhaps I should explain. My blood possesses a calming effect: a few drops are equivalent to multiple fully grown humans in terms of...hunger. Berserk, cannibalistic hunger. Not just sating it, but banishing it for a time. Given how my blood has calmed among the strongest avatars of Hindu gods, it isn't surprising it would work on Khorne." Shi dipped hir head in thought. "I had not experimented with it beyond my own Loop and the Atma Virus, however. It is...useful to know that it is as effective elsewhere."

The outhouse's door slowly creaked open, and Khorne staggered out.

A much scrawnier, less muscular Khorne.

"H....how..." he barely managed to gasp out, before losing his balance. Only an impromptu catch from another of Nurgle's tentacles stopped the god of bloodshed from an embarassing fall to the floor.

"H...how do you *live* like this?" He croaked out. Tzeentch could swear that he heard something he'd never heard from the god of war before.

Fear.

"I...feel...hollow. There's no rage...no feeling...I'm just...empty."

"*I* can help with that!" Slaanesh said cheerfully, walking in from literally nowhere.

"D...don't you dare..." Khorne protested feebly.

Try as he might, Tzeentch couldn't help but feel a little bit *sorry* for Khorne at the moment. With all of his endless rage and bloodlust beat back for the moment, he was a just a shell of a god.

Nurgle, on the other hand, was even *happier* than when this entire conversation had started, drinking in Khorne's sorrow and lethargy like a milkshake.

"...This is where you usually start beating the shit out of me," said Slaanesh, confused as to how Khorne wasn't frothing with rage at hir advances like usual, "and I get off on it. Are we doing something different now? Are *you* gonna be the sub this time?"

"He is merely disoriented," Seraph interjected. "As a being of rage incarnate, my blood should last...hours, at most. Minutes, possibly, considering the worldly strife and tragedy of

this universe."

"Oh, hel-*looooo* beautiful!" Slaanesh crooned, unceremoniously flinging the war god to the floor and turning to face Seraph. "Oooooh...." she said, sizing up every nook and cranny of the Anchor. "You take after *me!* You know, sex is *always* better when you don't limit yourself to one gender. What's say we get naked and bone like Angel Bunnies?"

"No thank you," Seraph said, refusing politely.

"...question's answered!" Tzeentch said *very* quickly, backing away as he spoke.
"I'm *not* seeing this again!"

"Okay. Let me try again," Slaanesh said, gently grabbing Seraph's chin and looking her square in the eyes, face to face. "Let's have sex. Right here. Right now."

Seraph looked into the face of lust incarnate. The face that drove even the most pious of Men and aliens to abandon all principles and embrace animalistic desires and mindless passion.

As Tzeentch fled in the background and Nurgle steathily escorted Khorne back to the outhouse, Seraph held Slaanesh's gaze.

"No."

Slaanesh blinked, then yelled in frusturation, backing off. "*Fuck me*! That's hot when Naoki and Kashima do it, but with *you*...you you *you*. You're that *sparring partner* he mentioned one time, aren't you? The only way you can get that stubborn without Anathema *bullshit* is by coming from Amala!"

"I have met the Demi-Fiend regularly, yes," Seraph said, nodding. "I have learned from him. And I hope that, perhaps, he has learned something from me.

"As to your proposition," shi continued, "Even if I wished to accept, I am needed elsewhere. I just wanted to make sure that the harm I had done was not lasting...which, thankfully, it was not. Goodbye."

"Goodby-" Slaanesh trailed off as Seraph vanished in a burst of ones and zeroes.

"Great, shi's one of those holier than thou assholes who think they're too good for fun," shi said, pouting. "Where *was* shi going, anyways?"

...

The great room of the Golden Throne *would* have been covered with blood right now.

While shi had enough empathy to render simple guardsmen merely unconscious,
Seraph *had* killed every zealot that came hir way. Out of the many truths of the universe shi had learned those many, many years ago when shi and the Embryon had defeated Brahma was that extremism was, with almost no exception, bad. In either direction.

Shi, of course, was fully aware of the hypocrisy of quelling Khorne's insatiable thirst and then spilling blood on hir own, but she never said that it was an inherently *bad* thing. You need to eat to live, after all, and people like hir had to feed off of Magnetite-most commonly found in the human body-, and it *was* in Khorne's nature to do the same. Nature can be overcome, but you must wish to move past your flaws to reach enlightenment.

Shi licked the blood from hir palms with hir mouth hands, and finished storing the corpse of the man who sat atop the Throne of Judgement for his fellow members of the Embryon Tribe. Particularly Heat: he seemed uncharacteristically quiet and distanced from the world in this last Loop. Something about an Underground; not Isabeau's, though. Shi would have to ask in the future.

Was that *really* necessary? the God-Emperor of Mankind asked, as he stitched his body together on a molecular level, carefully ensuring that the Astronomicon remained powered while he shifted in his seat to disconnect the now-unnecessary life support.

"I did not slaughter them all," shi said, "and I only dealt the killing blows when they refused surrender. And by now, you know of the plight that those who bear Atma suffer from. If we do not eat of human flesh or much rarer pure Magnetite, we go mad. Or die. Or go mad *and* die."

Hm. I will overlook this for now, because I have need of your talents. And because a being who could match, blow for blow, the man who withstood all the Prince of Excess's torments with ease, could likely not be detained without...consequences. Ones that he couldn't afford to pay, with the opportunity that had just dropped into his lap.

He kept quiet about that part, though.

He leaned forwards in his seat. **Your blood is not the only thing that is a balm to the berserk soul, correct?**

"Yes. The Prayer melody. I...I believe I know where you are going with this. It and my blood can fix supernatural aliments, but I don't know if can fix physical, neural damage. Every Loop, it is the same for him. I can *try* to help, but I give no guarentees."

Then teach me this song. The Emperor quickly wracked his brain for knowledge of musical scales and pitch-one of *very* few things he did not know off of the top of his head. **If you cannot save him this Loop, I will improve upon your design and help him in the future.**

Sighing, Seraph gently pushed aside hir suspicious of this man-he could do no permanent damage, after all-and nodded. "i must warn you, your voice may be too deeply pitched to preform the proper notes."

No. I will...

"Sorry," he said, dropping out of the booming Warp-infused speak and clearing his throat. "I will do whatever it takes, no matter how impossible it may seem, to save my sons."

[Nocturne], [Undertale]
Matador vs. an Annoying Dog
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Another Loop, another fight. Once again Naoki found himself against the Fiend Matador. By now the fight was really starting to wear on the Demi-fiend, having to go through it so much.

"Why are you even coming after me this time? You know that you can't even touch me anymore."

"It is because of that reason I fight. The sport of bull-fighting was made to challenge death. You are my bull, and even if you do defeat me, it will only spur me to strive to overcome you that much more."

He couldn't argue against that. But it still annoyed him.

"Now, HAVE AT YO-aurgh!"

The sight of the normally nimble demon tripping was shocking, but not as much as the reason for it happening.

"What in the world? My leg! Where did it go?!"

"It's over there." The fiend followed Naoki's finger to look behind him, revealing-

nom nom nom

- a strange white dog munching on the demon's detached shinbone.

"You! Perro Molesto(Annoying Dog)! Return my leg to me at once!"

The dog looked over to him, only to scoot away deeper into the the tunnel they were in.

"Why you!" The one legged fiend crawled after the dog, threatening it in an onslaught of Spanish swearing.

Naoki watched this and grinned. "Wonder if I can make a contract with it? It could be useful against the other fiends."

[SMT I], [Nocturne], [Strange Journey], [SMT IV], [Raidou Kuzunoha]
(no title)
Author: LostHereAndThere

Raidou Kuzunoha the XIV rubbed his nose as he surveyed the spectacle. The Herald of Yatagarasu was having a conniption at the entrance of the Narumi Detective Agency, fanned by a worried Tae. Narumi himself had hurried inside, desperately trying to reach his coffee pot and every bottle he owned before it was too late. A hamstrung Kaya Daidouji waited next to the Herald until she could be exorcized of the lingering future spirit within her. A furious Sukuna-Hikona uselessly beat at the glass globe imprisoning him in the Herald’s hands.

The half-demon, Kashima, was currently directing a host of demons at Tokyo Bay, riding a very enthusiastic Tarrasque. Isabeau and Flynn, the Mikado visitors, laboriously worked on the two gigantic war machines currently waiting in the water. Alder supervised the growth of a Cabracan near the bay's shores as Futsuo busied himself preparing for a chain summoning.

And all of a sudden, signals started firing up. A potent green light erupted from the bridge of the Soulless God Oumagatsu, as a blue flash shone from its twin Yasoumagatsu. The Cabracan was harried to the bay, pushed into position by the Tarrasque and a few native gods.

Kashima finished his preparations, and the sky opened in a flash of light. Two great figures descended from the heavens and into the waters of the bay, and Raidou knew them from past experience: the great gods Shiva and Vishnu. Both seemed greatly surprised and joyful of the spectacle before them, and immediately set to help.

Vishnu sank into the waters, supporting the slowly sinking Cabracan. From his own neck, Shiva took the great snake Vasuki. Rising into the air, he presented its front end to Oumagatsu. The machine activated with a mighty lurch, and seized the snake with both hands. Grinning, the flying god shot down, near the water surface, wrapping the king of snakes around the mountain demon in a tight loop. Again he darted up, and offered the demon's tail to the waiting Yasoumagatsu.

With a final flout of power, Shiva descended to the top of the Cabracan, and waited until both Soulless Gods lit up, signaling they were ready for the next part. With a clap, a gaggle of Apsaras laden with sitars, flutes, drums and tambourines surrounded him. With a gesture, they took positions around their lord and began their song. The cheerful deity began his dance, and yelled for the twin machines to begin their own role.

Slowly, Oumagatsu pulled at its end of the snake, and allowed Yasoumagatsu to do the same. One after the other. Shiva's delighted laugh filled the air as the colossi churned the waters of Tokyo Bay. It didn't take long for the waters to respond. Noxious, choking fumes started rising from the sea, only to be promptly swallowed by the dancing god.

Meanwhile, Futsuo finished his own summoning. Great circles of light surrounded him, and out of them poured several divinities. Leading the parade, Parvati, supported by Mada, gave the command to march to her husband, followed by Dionysius, Ame no Uzume, Thor and Cybele. Content with his part, Futsuo ran to meet with Alder and prepare for the final part.

In the middle of the bay, the divine assemblage danced and chanted as Parvati gathered the bubbling liquid that poured out of the sea into jars. As the goddess of love danced along in her mission, the other summoned gods instead focused their blessings into the jars' contents.

The immense grinding continued for a while as the summoners regrouped at the shoreline. The mishmash of strange people calmly waited for the divine rite to end. After a while, Parvati signaled to the giants to stop; their mission was finished. Scooping the last of the precious liquid, the goddess filled the last of the jars as the dance and song ended amongst claps and cheers. The Apsaras picked the jars reverently and carried them to the shoreline. Al of the divines hurried to the site, not wanting to be late.

It took quite a bit of haggling, but in the end each deity took his or her fair share of the jars, leaving still a good amount for the summoners. Amid resounding joy, each god was properly thanked for their role and left for their respective mansions. The great machines slowly folded back into the battleships they were supposed to be, and were promptly sunk by two flying figures that burst out of their bridges.

The ritual was over.

…

Raidou Kuzunoha sat at the entrance of the Ginroukaku, sharing the contents of his own jar with his mentors, Narumi and Gouto-douji.

"The lengths one has to go to get a decent drink in Amala."

[Nocturne], [Eiken], [Admin Shenanigans]
(no title)
Author: Facepalmist
Status: PENDING

Throughout the duration of Naoki Kashima's berserk rampage through the Loops, Taira no Masakado unsurprisingly found himself inundated with massive amounts of consequent paperwork. And abuse disguised as paperwork. And just plain abuse.

This was to be expected, for a number of reasons. (Hence the lack of surprise on Masakado's part.)

For starters, a certain stigma was always going to attach as a result of letting one of his realms' Anchors succumb to destructive instability, let alone being the first to fail in such an epically visible way. It may not have been the first time that an Anchor had flirted with instability - for instance, the very first Fused Loop had come about as a result of *precisely* this. In fact, Fenrir had only narrowly managed to avert one of his own Anchors from that bloody path by sending him to Sleipnir's Equestria - the very universe wherein Naoki Kashima had so violently exploded.

That it was Sleipnir and his little ponies at the epicentre of the disaster was another factor, though not all that much of one in the end. For all of Nyx's later protests, the bald fact was that by that point, the Amala Loop Anchor *was* an M.L.E. in every way that counted. It was bad enough for a *Looper* to plunge into the kind of mindless, single-minded savagery that Leah Clearwater had been lucky enough to avoid and just start slaughtering everything in their path. But when an Anchor did it - and especially when it was an Anchor like Naoki Kashima, who had acquired the power to kill gods in *baseline* and only got more skilled and powerful since he'd started Looping...

The worst that even someone like Waltz could do was cause the Loop to crash by killing the Anchor, assuming at least that there were no viral shenanigans associated with this. Naoki Kashima's brand of rampage didn't stop until either (a) everyone and everything was dead, or (b) the Loop crashed due to so much of its vital infrastructure being gutted...often literally.

And to make matters worse in terms of visibility: due to the godkiller's inherently unstable state, Masakado was forced to keep him out of his native Loops as much as adminly possible. While no-one had ever been unfortunate enough to prove it yet, all the available coding evidence had long led the Admins to operate on the assumption that it was entirely possible for a realm's Anchor to damage their entire universe's Yggdrasil code beyond repair if they constantly crashed their native Loops badly enough and over a long enough period. As such, the Amala realms' hapless Admin had no choice but to keep Naoki Kashima and the Loop titled '*Shin Megami Tensei 3 Nocturne*' at maximum separation while he attempted to find a fix. Simply put, it had reached the stage where the damage accrued by segregating the Anchor from his Loop, even added to the damage inflicted by having the Loop frequently crash because his Replacement couldn't take the baseline and got wiped out early, *was actually less* than the damage that would have racked up if Naoki Kashima was allowed his rein in his own Loop. And if nothing else, one isolated incident (read: one berserk rampage) in one Loop was relatively far easier for everyone to clean up afterwards.

That did not mean the other Admins, who were the ones left to *perform* said clean-up, were any happier or more sympathetic about this state of affairs. Especially when they also had to deal with their own Anchors and Loopers, who as a general whole tended not to understand the necessity of being forced into Fused Loops with the ridiculously lethal psycho.

...That said. There was one Admin who didn't in the *least* mind Naoki Kashima paying a visit to her realm.

•••

"Mistress!" one of her handmaidens called out. "Naoki Kashima's dropped in again!"

Aphrodite perked up with anticipation, saving and closing her latest collaborative effort with the delightful Suzumiya girl and swaying over to her official 'work' terminal. "Boy or girl this time?" she demanded.

"He's a boy, Mistress," the subordinate replied as she hurriedly rolled her chair out of the way. Another handmaiden scooted over with Aphrodite's ultra-deluxe executive loveseat-on-rollers just in time for the Greek love goddess to resettle herself back in the warm spot. A third minion dashed to the Admin's elbow with a solid gold trolley bearing several trays of snacks and beverages, with the sort of speed and surety of movement that came with much practice.

(Why yes, the Amala Anchor *had* been passing through Eiken more often than usual, why do you ask?)

Aphrodite kicked back, accepted an exquisitely crafted goblet filled with ruinously expensive (and rather delicious) wine, and lost herself in her solitary and favourite realm.

Or more specifically, Naoki Kashima's seemingly endless attempts to kill everyone in it.

It was a simple equation, yet still an equation that the Amala Anchor was in no state to even perceive, let alone combat. Sure - in any other realm, being Pocket-locked and stripped of all

his powers would be nothing but a momentary inconvenience. But there was one rule in Eiken that was ironclad and absolute: the Rule of Cause and Effect.

Or as the very nature of Eiken interpreted it: for every action - an equal, opposite and soft-core perverted reaction. (And also for every *in*action, but that was Eiken for you.) There was no give in that rule, even for one such as Naoki Kashima. Virtually every move he made might have been *intended* to messily and brutally end the life of one of its inhabitants... but that just meant virtually every move he made was interrupted by random chairs, tables, doors, floorboards, bystanders etc., and thus virtually every move he made ended up with hands and faces and other body parts in decidedly non-lethal places, or at least in non-lethal ways. And absolutely no-one dead. Seriously, minor suffocation, a great deal of back-pain, a few scratches and the odd nosebleed was pretty much the very worst that he could inflict.

One berserk Naoki Kashima placed into one Eiken, pretty much equaled 'Battle' Harem Slapstick...if the 'Battle' part translated to 'catfight'. It was broken at infrequent intervals by the all-too-human Amala Anchor passing out from sheer physical exhaustion...usually in someone's cleavage, or with someone in her cleavage, or both. Food was administered by doting fans while he (or she when his gender was switched for his latest visit) was too exhausted to struggle. And all this went on for *four subjective weeks*.

In other words: one of Aphrodite's highest forms of entertainment!

…

Another e-mail popped up on Taira no Masakado's work terminal. A single glance at the sender had him deleting the no-doubt spam vehicle with prejudice, not even stopping anymore to wonder why Aphrodite was heading her latest 'promotional material' with her allegedly-personal thanks lately. He had a Loop to save...

[Persona 3], [Future Card Buddyfight]
Having Death as your Buddy (title assigned by compiler) – parts 1 and 2
Author: Solaris Requiem

Drum had been through a lot of these resets, much more than any of the other people who knew what was going on. Sometimes things went exactly according to what had happened the first time around. Other times there were some minor changes to the timeline, such as the times where everyone was just a bit older, the time where Gao actually did end up losing more than once, and the one time where... well, everyone had swapped genders.

Most of the people involved had agreed to not speak a single word about that reset ever again. Unsurprisingly, Axia was the only one who seemed to not care. The sudden gender changed hadn't even phased the dragowizard; hell Drum didn't even notice any changes in his behavior.

But now, as Drum looked towards the students that were in the school's car, he frowned as he looked at the latest change the resets had brought up.

The change in question was a transfer student by the name of Minato Arisato. The boy was around Gao's age and had dark blue hair that covered one eye. At first the dragon had mistaken the new guy for the bombastic and cheery Tetsuya, the Buddy of the Second Omni Lord Asmodai, due to the headphones he wore over his ears. But the dark blue jacket, dress pants, and the almost apathetic look on his face had set him apart from the other teen.

While some of Gao's classmates talked and chatted with each other, the newcomer just blasted music on his headphone and looked out of the window of the van. It looked like he had no interest in listening or talking with the other kids in the van.

"Then what'cha gotta do is drop the hammer down, drop rhyme drop hammer digging like a labor. You've got blood all over, ash all over, spit it out, son game's over," Minato's headphones blasted out loud.

"Umm. Minato," Kurugu, one of Gao's classmates, spoke up, "Do you happen to play Buddyfight?"

Minato didn't seem to hear her over his own music, which caused the girl to tap Minato on the shoulder to catch his attention. The boy frowned as he paused his music and turned to Kurugu.

"Hm?" he asked. Kurugu repeated her question.

"I was wondering if you played Buddyfight," she said in an attempt to break the ice between them. "My friend Baku here builds Gao's Buddyfight decks."

"I don't play it," Minato shrugged. Behind him, another teen with a lion-print shirt peered over the back of the seat. It was Noboru, the Dragon Knight user. Drum never really got over the fact that he claimed that 'dragons needed riders because they were too dumb to think for themselves'. It didn't help that he became one of Yamigeddo's cronies later on.

"What, too scared that you'll lose?" Noboru taunted. Minato met the brash teen's eyes plainly without any sort of sign that he was being goaded by his taunt. In fact he looked exactly the same as he did throughout the entire trip: apathetic.

"No. It's just seems like a waste of time to me," Minato replied in monotone. The moment those words left his lips, all conversations died out in an instant as everyone else in the van, Drum included, stared at him as if he had just grown a third head.

"...It's true." Minato replied simply as if he was discussing the weather rather than calling the card game the entire world revolved around a waste of time. Every single person in the van, including the teacher driving the van in the first place, continued to stare at him; not quite comprehending the words that he just said.

"...You don't like Buddyfight," the head-banded Baku repeated slowly. "Have you even played it before?"

"No. I don't see the appeal."

Gao burst out, "How can you NOT like Buddyfight? You're fighting alongside monsters from another dimension. And if you get lucky, you get a partner like Drum or Asmodai. Yeah Drum's a pain in the butt sometimes-"

"Hey!" the forementioned 'pain in the butt' protested.

"But he's a good friend. I wouldn't trade him for anything in the world."

"Alright, I'll let you go for saying that," Drum grumbled.

"I'm just not interested in it," Minato sighed as he failed to get his point across. "Is it THAT weird that I don't like Buddyfight?"

"YES!" everyone else cried out in unison. Minato blinked once at the loud response as his expression shifted into one of surprise rather than apathy.

"Listen," Baku offered, "I'll build you your own deck for free. It's really fun, just give it a try."

"I'll pass." Minato sighed as he turned his music back on. The conversation was over.

"I never thought I'd meet someone who didn't like Buddyfight," Baku said to Kurugu.

"There's a first for everything, I guess." she sighed. "It's just... I've been waiting to get a Buddy Rare card for such a long time. And to find someone who would gladly throw that away..."

Drum frowned as he considered the newest student. What the heck was going on with this reset? He hadn't met someone who downright disliked Buddyfight, well, ever.

He glanced over at Kiri who was sitting at the back end of a the truck, who gave him a shrug that indicated he had no idea what was going on. Since Kiri had showed up with Joker this earlier that day, it was clear that he had retained the memories from the original timeline. It was just that the disguised Omni Lord looked just as dumbfounded, if not more so, than everyone else in the vehicle.

...

Minato Arisato was slightly annoyed at the glances and whispers that his statement had created during this particular fused Loop. He hadn't made gotten any sort of response from his Ping earlier, and he hadn't been able to locate the Anchor of this particular Loop. Had it just started Looping?

This Loop was a weird mash-up of Digimon, Yu-Gi-Oh, with a bit of Magic the Gathering. In this Loop, the game Buddyfight allowed players to summon creatures from 10 different worlds while allowing them to have a Monster as their "Buddy" or partner.

Had he been more interested in card games he might have enjoyed the Loop a bit more. But he had done enough fighting in Baseline alone that doing that kind of combat was... kind of dull. He had personally faced down the manifestation of Death herself and sacrificed his soul

to seal her away. This 'children's card game' was nothing compared to what he faced in his home Loop. To be honest, he found the existence of the other parallel dimensions themselves more fascinating than some card game.

The van was currently headed towards the Fuji Photon Metal Mine where workers created the special deck cases that were used in Buddyfights, specifically made for those with a Buddy Monster. Although he was told that there was going to be a quiz on what the students had learned there, Minato couldn't bring himself to really care about the assignments. He had constantly gone through high school over and over again, compared to that doing middle school homework was a piece of cake.

He could probably do all of the assignments with his eyes closed at this point. They were THAT easy. Frankly he couldn't help but fall asleep during class most of the time, which had gotten him in trouble more than once.

"Alright then, we're here!" the professor declared, snapping Minato out of his contemplation. Within seconds the van emptied of its inhabitants with Drum reverting back into his card form at the professor's insistence. Minato, of course, was the very last one to leave.

He clicked his music player off and put his headphones around his neck as a show of courtesy to the teacher. Meanwhile Gao looked eagerly into the empty compound with what looked like child-like enthusiasm. Which was understandable since, well, Gao was 12 years old.

"It's a bit more... quiet than I thought it might be." Kurugu mentioned.

"Yeah, where's the bus?" Noboru asked as the group looked around. There was, indeed, not a single bus in sight. "The school bus should have been here already since it left way before we did."

"It's probably stuck in traffic or something," Baku said. "I'd say we just wait it out. They should be here any minute."

Minato scanned his surroundings as he felt his sense go into overdrive. It was indeed a bit TOO quiet. And if the Loops had taught him anything... It was that BAD things happened when things got too quiet.

"Everybody get back into the van, now!" the professor cried out, catching the attention of everyone else. Minato sighed, as usual his instincts were not wrong.

"What's wrong?" Kurugu asked as she, Noboru, and Baku gathered around him.

"There's been some sort of an accident within the mines. The field trip got cancelled, so the bus turned around already." the professor cried aloud as he read the message on the phone. The other students looked back at him in shock. Noboru frowned as he realized something.

"There's a problem. Gao already ran towards the mine. Kiri followed after him in order to get him to come back but both of them are still missing," he reported.

Minato closed his eyes and exhaled, "I'll get them." The moment those words left his mouth, everybody started staring at him incredulously. Once again he was the center of attention, how annoying.

"Are you crazy?!" Baku hissed. "They closed down the facility for a reason, you know! We should contact the Buddy Police and let them-"

"By the time the Buddy Police arrive Gao and Kiri might already be dead." Minato cut him off bluntly as he turned away from the group. "I'm going after them."

"You might die if you go through there!"

"It's better than sitting around here and doing nothing." Minato shot back with his eyes narrowed. Without another word he quickly ran towards the center of the compound, presumably where Gao and Kiri had ended up. He ignored the protests from the others as he quickly headed towards the center of the danger.

When he was sure that he was out of sight of the others, he reached deep into his Pocket and withdrew an ornate sword. The moment he wrapped his hand around the handle, he felt strength flow into his body like a surging tide. Lucifer's Blade augmented several aspects of his body; such as his agility, strength, and defense. Something told him that he was going to need it. And as he learned from his Baseline, following that instinct and that voice in the back of your mind sometimes was the difference between life and death.

As he charged towards an unknown danger with his chosen weapon in hand, he couldn't help but feel slightly relieved.

It looked like this Loop might not be as boring as he thought it was.

...

"I think we should head back... The others are really far behind us," Kiri said as he and Gao made their way deeper into the compound. Kiri, or rather Miserea, already knew what was going to happen next. Rouga Aragami, the future Buddy of the Eighth Omni Deity Lord Grangadez, would attack the facility under the alias 'Wolf' in order to steal several deck-cases for his leader, Kyoya Gaen. He couldn't just let Gao face off against Rouga alone, even if Drum was currently accompanying his friend.

"It'll be fine Kiri! Besides, we might find stuff that might make us better Buddyfighters! Or maybe something that will convince Minato to try out Buddyfighting!" Gao declared enthusiastically as he charged forward. Kiri couldn't help but to find Gao's enthusiasm to be bit... infectious as he put forth his best effort to catch up with his athletic friend.

It was only a few moments before they entered the main mining complex, but the human and the Omni Lord stopped in their tracks and glanced around them. The formerly pristine buildings of the factory bore the tell-tale signs of combat. Black smoke billowed from the dozens of large craters and holes burrowed through the outsides of the facility, making them resemble large blocks of cheese rather than buildings.

"What the heck happened here?" Gao walked deeper into the facility, Kiri tensing up unseen behind him. With a flash of light, Drum manifested alongside the red haired teen in his larger form, forgoing his normal Omni Lord form for his very first, and basic, form cloaked in brass armor with his large, engine-driven drill in one hand. Both he and Kiri had decided to lay low this early in the reset, and as such neither of them would choose to take their Omni Lord forms unless they had no other choice.

"These... are drill holes?" Drum rumbled thoughtfully as he examined the edges of the circular holes. It was expected after all, Drum's primary weapons of choice were drill-themed. "Yeah, the grooves check out. But you'd think this place would be, I don't know, a bit sturdier?"

Kiri gave a sigh of relief. He had given Drum advice about staying under the radar and telling white lies to his Buddy in order to keep Gao from finding things out too soon. And thankfully it seemed that Drum had taken those lessons to heart; subtlety was not something that the armored dragon was suited for.

"Those must have been huge drills then..." Gao shrugged as he moved forwards, Drum at the ready and following close behind him.

Kiri and Drum had a battle-plan when it came to this encounter. Firstly, Drum would distract Rouga and his buddy Cerberus. Kiri would then use Joker to take back the stolen deck cases while Rouga was under siege. If this worked, which it usually did, it would end up setting back Kyoya's plans by around a month or so, which in turn gave them another extra month since time always seemed to reset itself when they were swallowed by Yamigeddo rather than on a specific date.

"Looks like today's not your day," a rough voice called from above. Kiri and the others looked above them and found the person who they were looking for.

The figure on the roof of the building had dark skin and wild silver hair, with his cold eyes hidden behind a simple mask. Gripped in his right hand was a black drill-headed spear surrounded by glowing violet rings of energy. A silver briefcase was clutched in the other hand, the dull metal surface shining in the dark aura that surrounded the thief. Accompanying him was a large armored hound with three heads. Its fur was white as snow, and attached to its body were dozens of weapons painted bright yellow, not unlike construction equipment. Rouga and his Buddy Cerberus had finally arrived.

"Who the heck are you?!" Gao demanded as he pointed an accusing figure towards the masked thief above them.

"None of your business," he stated coldly. He tightened his grip on his spear as he scowled at the three outsiders. "I was told not to leave any witnesses, so you're just going to have to disappear!" the masked teen snarled. He turned his gaze sideways towards his Monster.

"Cerberus, deal with them."

With a single howl, the three-headed beast brought the dozens of weapons attached to his body forward. Four drills began to spin and whirl to life as the beast leapt off of the roof of

the building and descended upon Kiri and Gao.

"Back off!" Drum snarled as his own drill, the Salamander Engine, roared in defiance. The dragon brought the montrous drill forward with almost effortless ease and intercepted the attack. The two weapon screeched against each other as the Danger World and the Dragon World monsters clashed.

"You're gonna have to do better than that!" Drum bellowed as he knocked away Cerberus with a single push. With a single swipe, Cerberus' drills were shattered apart, leaving only spinning fragments of metal in their place. "This drill was passed down to me from my ancestors. Those pitiful toys of your can't even scratch it!"

Cerberus remained silent and chose to change tactics. Two gatling guns unfolded from his back and began to spin ominously.

"Crap!" Drum swore as he quickly grabbed hold of both Kiri and Gao. Using the exhaust of his drill as a make-shift rocket, Drum sidestepped the sudden storm of lead and brought the two under cover.

"Stay here. I'll take care of this." The armored dragon quickly gathered his strength and leapt to the top of a nearby building, bringing himself under cover as Cerberus continued his lethal assault.

"What the heck- Drum!" Gao called out about to follow after his Buddy. Kiri quickly pulled him back under cover.

"Gao wait! Neither of us stand a chance against them." Kiri stated. It was a flat-out lie of course: both Kiri and Drum could easily beat Rouga and his buddy then and there, but Kiri had to continue his masquerade as human for now and Drum had planned to lay low for a while.

"I can't just-"

"You trust Drum, right? He can handle it himself."

Gao grit his teeth as he watched the clash between his Buddy and the armored wolf. For all of his prowess at martial arts, he was still powerless when compared to the Monsters.
But before he could dwell on it more a voice cut in from above.

"Found you!" Rouga snarled as he brought his lance down from above them. Kiri, having known that Rouga would do such a thing, was already prepared.

"Joker, now!" he cried out. Beneath the ground, the Dungeon World monster heeded his lord's call and erupted from the ground in a shower of earth and dust.

"What the-" Rouga bit out before he was forced to parry a strike from Joker's claws before another claw-strike knocked the briefcase out of his hands and out towards the battle-ground.

Rouga cursed before he brought forth a glowing card from the eye-like jewel on his weapon. "Armorknight Eagle, grab the cases!" from the summoned card came a white eagle, cloaked

in bulky armor. He screeched and flapped his wings as he dove after it, and grabbed it with his talons.

"Joker, don't let him get away!" Kiri called out.

"Understood, my lord! I'll make sure to ground him!" Joker replied cheekily as he spread his own wings and took off. "Here, birdy birdy..."

"Now it's just you and me." Rouga growled as he swung his spear around. "Nothing personal, I just have a job to do."

Gao brought Kiri behind him as Rouga marched forward with his spear in hand. It spun and glowed with dark energy as the masked teen sought to end the two teens right then and there.

'Looks like I don't have a choice...' Kiri thought to himself as he prepared to summon forth his water magic forward to shield the both of them. But such a thing was unneeded.

CLANG!

Before his eyes the unknown student, Minato Arisato blocked the blow almost instantaneously with a strange sword in his grip. The grip and centerpiece resembled a grail in appearance, with several set of metal wings emerging from the circumference of it. From the center of the chalice a ethereal blade emerged, cloaked in a light-less aura that exuded a strange presence.

"The hell did you come from?!" Rouga hissed as he brought his weapon back for another attack. But Minato did not let Rouga get in another strike.

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! The sound of metal striking metal filled the area as two teen dueled. Minato's strikes were almost clock-work in efficiency and power; there was not a single wasted movement and not a single trace of hesitation or fear on his face. Rouga, in comparison attacked aggressively and fiercely. But for every strike that Rouga attempted to make, Minato struck at him thrice, forcing him backwards and away.

"Minato?!" Gao gaped when Rouga was forced to retreat by a large amount, "What the heck was you doing here? I thought you were with the others."

"I'm here to retrieve you," the stoic teen replied as he flicked his sword idly. He had not taken his eyes off of the panting Rouga and as always his expression remained completely emotionless.

Kiri however remained silent, but inwards his thoughts were racing. The way that Minato fought spoke of a vast amount of fighting experience. His ease with a blade wasn't that of a trainee, nor a novice. It was like watching a master swordsman taking down an amateur student. It was Minato's eyes that gave him away; his eyes did not belong on a child that was merely 12 years of age.

"Not bad," Rouga growled. "But I don't have time for this." he summoned forth another card from his spear and brought it out. "Armorknight Ogre, attack him!" With a flash of light a

lumbering blue titan with gun-metal armor with a mace twice as tall as Minato was.

With a lumbering gait the ogre brought his club down upon the blue-haired swordsman with the intent to crush him into the ground.

"Minato!" Gao cried out in alarm. But by the time those words left his mouth, Minato was already moving, sidestepping the mace's crushing path. The ground crumbled inches away from Minato as the nimble teen dodged strike after earth-shattering strike.

"Tch." Minato stepped backwards and created space between the bulky armored monster.

"Not bad," Rouga taunted, "But a human can't fight against a monster by himself. Just give it up!"

Minato looked up with Rouga with his cold gaze before he placed his sword in his left hand and reached into his jacket with the right. There was a soft click and a rustle of fabric as he withdrew a short gun. It's short barrel was polished to a mirror shine with the words 'SEES' engraved on the receiver. The grip of the gun pulsed with a strip of sapphire light as Minato clutched it with a hand just a bit too small for it. He slowly walked forward towards Rouga and the Monster he had under his control.

"A gun?" Rouga scoffed, "That little pea-shooter isn't going to even scratch me or my monster. What exactly do you plan on doing with it?"

Rather than to explain in words, Minato decided to let his actions speak for him. In an almost casual motion, like bringing a cellphone to his ear, Minato brought the small silver gun up and rested the muzzle of it against his temple.

"What the- are you brain-dead?!" Rouga demanded in disbelief.

Gao quickly dashed forward, trying to get to Minato in time to stop what looked like a completely suicidal action, "Minato, don't! We can still-"

But before Gao could take his second step, Minato exhaled once and began to squeeze the trigger.

"Persona."

There was a ringing gunshot and the sound of shattering glass. There was a burst of blue light and a release of unfathomable power, and it sent Gao flying backwards, landing next to Kiri on his rear.

"Gao!" the Omni Lord cried out in alarm as he helped his friend up. Gao groaned in pain as he looked up and froze.

Around Minato's form was a blue storm of what appeared to be glass, swirling around the teen like a literal hurricane, that bathed him in a eerie blue light and scattered dust and dirt around him. And above the teen, something began to slowly emerge from the maelstrom of light piece by piece. As it did so an echoing voice resounded throughout the compound, bringing even Drum and Joker's fights to a halt.

"I am thou, and thou art I." a colorless mask, humanoid in appearance manifested first along with fair hair that looked as if it were spun from gold.

"From the sea of thy soul, I come." a mechanical torso followed, with a speaker in the figure's stomach. The chassis of the being was painted a bloody vermilion.

"I am the winding path you have tread. I am the crystallization of the bonds you have formed." mechanical arms arms and legs, golden in color, were formed from the storm of potential. Ivory hands and feet shortly followed as the figure hovered in the air above Minato.

"I am Orpheus Telos, Master of Strings." the figure declared as it asserted its identity and form upon the world. In its mechanical grip a golden lyre, one crafted from a resplendent gold and as large as the figure itself, formed as the storm subsided.

"Come, let us sing of Life's grandeur... forevermore."

Solaris Requiem's Buddyfight fused snips

Chapter Notes

> Solaris Requiem is the sole author of the following snips. However, these snips are not complete - to read all the parts, please check the previous and following chapters.

[Persona 3], [Future Card Buddyfight]
Having Death as your Buddy – parts 3 and 4

"What kind of Monster is that?!" Rouga demanded as Orpheus slid the Golden lyre upon his back. The manifestation of Minato's own psyche hovered protectively over his body, the expression on his colorless mask grim yet stoic.

"It's not a Monster," Minato said blandly as he spun the silver gun on his finger. "It's called a Persona. It is not limited by the flesh and blood; it exists as a concept and an identity given material form."

"Stop talking in riddles dammit!" Rouga grit his teeth before Armorknight Ogre charged with his metal club raised. Minato's Persona responded in suit, wordlessly following the order that its master had given. The construct brought forth the lyre on its back and met the ogre's charge with its own attack. The two weapon collided with the thunderous sound of clashing metal, yet despite this it was not the smaller persona's weapon that was cast aside, but rather the larger ogre's.

"The hell?!" Rouga watched in almost disbelief as his larger monster was pushed back by the small and lithe Orpheus. Minato's expression was unchanging as the ogre was forced on the defensive, Orpheus' titanic strikes pushing the larger monster back. Upon the third strike, the ogre's club shattered into pieces while the lyre that the Persona wielded did not even have so much as a blemish.

"Agi," Minato commanded, and Orpheus obeyed without a single moment of hesitation.

Power coursed through Orpheus' body as its pale eyes glowed with power. There was no other warning before a fireball flashed into existence, engulfing the armored monster in flames as it screamed in agony.

"Ogre!" Rouga cried out in alarm as the smell of scorched flesh filled the air. Defenseless, the Monster could do nothing but burn to death. The monster's body shattered into dozens of pieces, dissolving into motes of energy that streamed back into Rouga's spear.

"Had enough?" Minato replied coldly as Orpheus floated back into its original position near him. The area still burned with the residual flames from Orpheus' attack, sending smoke and

ash into the air.

Rouga grit his teeth in rage before he drew another card from his spear. "Cast: Drill Bunker!" he declared. A torrent of silver energy, designed to pierce and maim, streamed from the card and towards the two of them. But Orpheus was already there with its lyre at ready. With a single swing the torrent of energy was batted aside into the wall of a nearby building, sending shards of concrete and metal flying.

"Wait... Isn't Drill Bunker a spell card?" Gao asked as he shielded his eyes from the shards of concrete. "How did he cast it in the real world? I thought they only worked in Buddyfights!"

"You're asking the wrong person Gao!" Kiri shot back, despite knowing the answer to that question already.

"Dammit." Rouga cursed as he considered the last options he had. He was currently outnumbered two to one, and he didn't have a single idea about the capabilities of that... thing that Minato kid had summoned.

As much as he hated it, the only option he had was to retreat and reorient himself.

"Eagle, Cerberus, to me!" he commanded before he pulled another card from his spear. "Cast: Thunder Devastation!" The card dissolved into light as his spear began to charge with electrical energy. Minato braced himself for an attack but, was caught off guard when Rouga stabbed his own spear into the ground rather attack him. Thunder crackled around Rouga before the ground exploded, sending dirt and dust flying into a thick cloud of debris.

"Garu." Minato replied coldly as Orpheus swept a hand sideways, dispelling cloud of dust and smoke with a small emerald hurricane. But Rouga was already gone and out of sight.

"He got away," Minato sighed as Orpheus dissolved back into motes of azure light. Although as powerful as Orpheus was, Minato couldn't track down his enemies like his allies from his home Loop could. All he could really do right now was to retrieve the two other students.

"Are you two hurt?" he asked as he turned to Gao and Kiri. He expected them to be slack-jawed, stunned, and unharmed. He did not expect Gao to punch him in the face.

"Why the heck did you do that?! You didn't need to point a gun at your own head!" Gao hissed. Minato felt his cheek throb painfully, but he had faced worse before.

"It's not a gun, it's an Evoker. It doesn't have any bullets." To demonstrate Minato pointed the gun downwards and pulled the trigger. There was a short burst of blue light and energy, but the ground remained completely and utterly unharmed.

"But still! You're not supposed to point that at your own head! Can't you call your Buddy without using that?!"

"I can, and Orpheus is not my-"

"Then why did you need to use that?!" Gao shouted as he gestured at the Evoker in Minato's grip. The blue-haired teen just shrugged.

"It's easier to use an Evoker than to summon my Persona manually," Minato stated in a matter-of-fact voice.

Gao looked like he wanted to protest but then a large explosion caught their attention. High above and far ahead from them, Cerberus was engaged in combat with a green dragon while the masked thief was facing off against another kid around Gao's age with sky-blue hair.

"That's Tasuku and Jack!" Gao realized. "They're with the Buddy Police! They must have found that guy from earlier!" Without so much as hesitating, Gao ran towards the fighting to see if there was any way he could help.

Minato sighed in exasperation as he followed after Gao. The red haired teen reminded him a bit too much of Junpei, one of his closest friends. Both of them seemed to rush into danger head-first without thinking things through.

Meanwhile, Joker landed next to Kiri with half of a silver briefcase in tow. "Mission accomplished, my lord. The bird has been put... on ice. Unfortunately, it looks like I was only able to recover half of it."

"Good job Joker," Kiri smiled as he took the case back. But then he frowned as he searched through his memory.

Why was that word, 'Persona', so familiar to him? He was positive that it had not existed in the original timeline. What had changed?

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"Future Force authorized," the communicator in Tasuku's ear rang. The blue-haired officer sighed in relief as he closed his eyes. He focused on the well of power within him as the blue gem in his Star Pulsar, the item his deck case had become, flashed crimson. His body began to glow with golden light as he felt his powers rise.

With this ability, Tasuku was able manifest cards into reality: the perfect counter to the Disaster Force that Rouga was using currently to manifest his items and spells into the real world.

"Equip: Dragobrave." With a flash of golden light, armored gauntlets and boots manifested before he gripped a large zweihander in both hands. He tightened the grip on his weapon before he brought it down upon Rouga's guard. The wheels of light around Tasuku's feet allowed him superior mobility in the air, allowing him to easily maneuver around the slower Rouga and exploit openings in his guard.

CLANG! CLANG! The ringing of manifested metal on metal sang in the air as Tasuku easily outclassed Rouga's close-combat abilities. He had received training in Dragon World alongside Gao, Jack, and Drum in the previous resets after all. Compared to that, Rouga might have as well been a kid with a toy.

"Dammit! First that blue haired kid with that weird Buddy Monster, now a guy that has Future Force?!" Rouga snarled in frustration as he blocked a heavy kick from Tasuku.

"Blue-haired kid? What are you talking about?" Tasuku frowned. He was sure that there was no such 'blue haired kid' during this part of the timeline.

"None of your business!" Rouga snarled in defiance as the two continued the one-sided clash.

Jack soared through the air with his armored wings as he engaged Cerberus in combat. Cerberus snarled as the missile pod on his back fired off a salvo of drill-tipped missiles at the green dragon. But like his partner, Jack had far more experience fighting than Cerberus could have even dreamed of. Jack ducked and wove through the hail of explosives effortlessly, baiting the missiles into each other and causing them to detonate into each other in a flash of light and energy.

"Hold still!" Cerberus snarled with his three heads as he followed up with his Gatling gun. But Cerberus' targeting systems were too slow to keep up with Jack, causing the storm of lead to miss Jack's soaring form by at least a foot.

Drum on the other hand watched the fighting from above, taking a brief break to catch his breath. There were some dents in his armor from a few close calls with Cerberus, but it was nothing that he couldn't fix. And even then, shifting back and forth from card form should repair all of the damage that he had sustained. Unfortunately he would leave Cerberus up to Jack: his current form wasn't really that good at aerial combat. Besides, he had other matters to attend with.

"Hey, stay awake!" Drum gently shook a Buddy Police officer, trying to keep him conscious. He had taken a nasty hit by Rouga's spell card and Drum's own makeshift first-aid measures were slowly losing their effectiveness.

"Drum!" Gao called out. The armordragon looked towards his buddy and grimaced when he saw Gao covered head to toe in dust.

"Gao! You alright?" he knew that he could rely on Kiri to protect Gao, should it have been necessary, but it was still relieving to see his Buddy unharmed.

"Yeah, Minato saved both of us. He summoned a cool Monster to beat up the ogre that thief guy sent out."

"Wait, what?!" Drum gaped. It was only then that he noticed the weapons in Minato's hands: the strange sword and the short-barreled gun.

"Later," Minato replied, cutting Drum off before any questions could be asked before he nodded towards the injured officer. "I'll heal him."

Gao looked visibly annoyed. "You're not going to shoot yourself again, are you?"

"What the heck are you talking about?!" Drum blanched, "Did you just say 'shoot yourself again'?!"

Minato sighed before he shook his head. "I won't." He closed his eyes, focusing and breathing for a few seconds. He already summoned Orpheus earlier so as such he did not

need to invoke his Persona again for what he was about to do next. He laid a hand on the injured man and whispered.

"Dia."

The man's body began to glow with a green light before his wounds slowly began to close. His breathing got easier and after several more agonizing seconds, the worst of the man's wounds were fully healed.

"Ugh..." the man groaned as his mind slipped into unconsciousness. But other than that, he was perfectly healthy.

"It's the first time I've seen a human use magic directly," Drum noted as he frowned at Minato. "We'll talk later though. We need to take care of that other guy, although I think Tasuku and Jack have that under control."

As he said those words, Tasuku sent Rouga flying downwards with a spinning kick. Rouga recovered and landed deftly on his feet, panting in exertion before Cerberus joined him sporting his own share of injuries.

"This entire heist has been a complete mess," Rouga snarled. Cerberus readied whatever weapons that were still operational. Armorknight Eagle appeared next to Rouga, depositing half of the briefcase into his hands and returning himself to Rouga's spear.

"Now would be the best time to leave before we lose any of the other cases." Cerberus rumbled in his distorted, tri-tonal voice. But before either of them could even think of escaping there was a flash of golden light from high above. The sky was dyed a golden hue as a golden barrier of light surrounded the area.

"Too late," Tasuku replied as Jack took up a position next to his Buddy. "As long as this Buddy Police Barrier is active escaping here will be impossible unless you beat me at a Buddyfight."

"How convenient," Minato mused as he walked closer to Rouga. "So as you don't agree to a Buddyfight, he'll be trapped here. Correct?"

"Yes, but who are you?" Tasuku asked, unnerved by the fact he was seeing an unknown face after so many resets.

"You again?!" Rouga hissed as he brought his weapon up.

"Later," Minato shook his head as he brought his Evoker up as he addressed Tasuku. "Don't Buddyfight him, I'll just knock him out while he can't escape." He pressed the muzzle of the Evoker against the side of his head and, before Tasuku or Jack could even protest, pulled the trigger.

"Not again..." Gao groaned as Orpheus Telos manifested himself once more in all of his ethereal glory. Rouga grit his teeth and prepared for battle, but his Buddy Monster had an entirely different reaction

"Orpheus? That's... How?" Cerberus' center head whispered, his eyes wide and his voice disbelieving. Rouga looked up towards his partner in what looked to be concern for the briefest of moments.

"We'll talk about this later," Rouga replied. "Can you fight him?"

Cerberus grunted, "I will try." With a roar he brought his salvo of weapons online and fired everything towards the gathered group of people.

"Cast: Green Dragon Shield!" Tasuku declared. Before him, a large green shield decorated with the head of a dragon manifested in the air, nullifying Cerberus' the dozens of missiles, bullets, and other projectiles with ease.

"Zio!" Minato ordered. But for the briefest of moments Orpheus seemed to hesitate for the briefest of moments before attacking. The resulting thunderbolt seemed to barely miss Cerberus' armored form, allowing the enemy Monster to escape unharmed.

Minato frowned at his Persona's hesitance to harm his opponent. That was something that had never happened before. Could it be that this Loop changed the very nature of Personas ever so slightly? Regardless of the reasons why, he wasn't sure if he could properly damage Cerberus directly with Orpheus. Therefore...

"Heat Riser." Minato commanded.

Orpheus began to play his lyre with masterful fingers; each string sang in a frenzied harmony that roused the blood and strengthened his allies. There was a pulse of crimson light that engulfed Jack and Drum, filling them with titanic strength, agility, and endurance.

"This feels amazing!" Drum grinned as he felt the Persona's energy flow through him. He revved up his Drill and charged forward towards the injured Monster. Jack spread his wings and took off, the blade on his helm already unfolded and ready for combat.

"Tch, Armorknight Demon!" Rouga called out. From his hand emerged a hulking, blue-skinned monster onto the field armed with a battle-ship's worth of weaponry. It materialized on the battle field covered in healed battle scars and with its weapons glowing with power.

"Get out of my way!" Drum shouted as he brought forth his drill. The mountain of a monster brought forth the two massive arm cannons he carried, the insides of their barrels glowing violet with latent and earth shattering power. It released the six beams of unleashed energy, but it was hopelessly futile. With a sudden burst of sped, Drum ducked under the massive attack and leapt upwards.

"Eat this! Drill Ram Bunker!" the dragon roared as his body and weapon began to glow red hot. With a mighty shout, the augmented weapon tore through meat and metal like tissue paper, obliterating the monster's entire right side.

Jack followed up shortly afterwards, flying down from an attack and bisecting the remaining part of the Armorknight cleanly in half. Armorknight Demon exploded into a shower of red fragments instantly, defeated before his body hit the ground.

"Dammit," Rouga snarled in rage. "If that blue-haired brat wasn't here..." But before he could finish his thought, Orpheus was before him with his lyre raised for a crushing blow.

"Wolf!" Cerberus cried out in alarm and he intercepted the earth-shattering strike. The weapons that the hound had used to block to strike began to spark and smoke as the Monster and the Persona locked weapons.

"Orpheus, snap out of it! Don't you remember me?!" Cerberus cried, desperation in his voice for the first time during that entire struggle. The Persona remained silent, only tilting his mechanical head slightly. And to Minato's complete and utter bafflement, his Persona spoke.

"I am not who you seek. I am nothing more than echo of the one you knew as Orpheus, one among many in the Sea of Souls."

"You have his voice, you have his lyre, and you have his skill! How can you not be him?! How can you not be the first friend I ever made?!" Cerberus snarled. Minato was confused by the interaction between the Monster and his own Persona.

How many things had changed during this Loop? He had encountered minor changes to abilities throughout the Loops, but not one so... extensive.

"I inherited his identity and memories, but I am not who you seek. I am merely a reflection. The Orpheus you knew died when his counterpart was destroyed; he drowned in despair and took his own life. I am merely an echo of the person who he once was. An almost perfect echo, but an echo nonetheless."

"I don't care!" Cerberus growled as he pushed back Orpheus with whatever strength he had left. Orpheus complied and allowed himself to be pushed back. "Stop this! I do not wish to fight you."

"Then surrender."

"You know I can't do that..." Cerberus growled. Rouga clenched his fist was he watched his Buddy Monster. He did not envy his position of fighting a former comrade.

But then there was a flash of light, as the barrier slowly began to crumble. Sunlight streamed through the fading curtain of energy before black thunderclouds formed overhead.

"About time," Rouga snarled. But in the back of his mind, a part of him was relieved that Cerberus would not have to fight his former friend. There was a crack of violet thunder before a bolt of energy engulfed the two of them, sending the two to a completely different location.

"They got away..." Tasuku sighed as he looked towards Minato. Although he was relieved that they had only gotten away with three or so of the deck cases, the most recent changes had troubled him: specifically the anomaly that was known as Minato Arisato.

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Minato exhaled once before he sent his sword back into his Pocket and re-holstered his Evoker. Orpheus dissolved into particles of blue light shortly afterwards and vanished back into dormancy within his mind. He would attempt to ask Orpheus a few questions later on; some of the changes that had occurred during this Fused Loop needed to be answered.

He turned back to Gao and the others and groaned mentally. He still owed them an explanation, and there was a lot of things that he needed to cover.

"You shot yourself again." Gao glared at him, anger simmering in his eyes. "You... You didn't even hesitate. Is your life worth that little to you?"

"It's not that," Minato sighed. "I just don't fear death." As the Looper looked around him at the gathering figures, including Kiri who was quickly catching up with the others, his experience Looping gave him a valuable piece of insight. Normally the Anchor of a Loop had a major role in the events in a Loop's timeline, and Minato was sure that this large scuffle qualified as a major event in the Loop's timeline.

Therefore, the Anchor of the Loop or at least some of the Loopers, should be currently present here.

"There's a lot of things worse than death..." Minato ventured as he observed the expressions of the people around him. "Like being stuck in a Time Loop and being forced to repeat things over and over again."

Minato was adept enough at reading people to recognize a flicker of recognition on every single person present. Except for Gao who just looked confused but still angry.

"Don't try to change the topic!" Gao hissed before Drum had to physically stop him from charging at Minato.

"Enough, Gao. We need to get back to the others. They're probably worried sick. I wouldn't be surprised if they called your Mom already," the dragon rumbled.

Gao wanted to argue but clenched his teeth, "Fine." with those words he stormed off back to the other students at the entrance. Drum sighed as he watched his partner go.

"Sorry about that," the dragon sighed. "Gao's brother died of illness several years ago. It's rare to see him act like this though, your whole shooting yourself thing must have really hit a nerve.

"I see..." Minato frowned before he looked to the others, "I'm guessing the rest of you know what I'm talking about then, correct? About the Loops?"

“The what?” Jack asked.

Minato sighed, "Looks like I'm going to have to explain everything. Weird, usually the Ponies are the ones who do it."

"The what?" Drum echoed.

"...Never mind. Let's just go somewhere private so I can tell the rest of you what's going on."

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Kiri's house, barely furnished and completely ordinary, lacked the warmth one would typically expected find in a home. It was the home of a person who lived far too long alone. Majority of the furniture was untouched, and only one of the two bedrooms had been used recently. There was no TV installed, only a small table that only Kiri used. Indeed, only Kiri and occasionally Joker had ever set foot in this place more than once throughout the resets.

The exterior of the house was modest and simple enough that everybody who saw it merely turned a blind eye to it. It was registered under Kiri's father, who also did not actually exist. As such it was the perfect place for private discussion without the danger of eavesdropping.

"Sorry about the mess. I didn't expect to have anybody over... well, ever," the disguised Omni-Lord admitted as he started preparing a few small snacks and refreshments. "Gao's place is a lot better to have people over. Since my human identity involves me moving around a lot, I don't really have that many things to pack when I do move."

"Human identity?" Minato inquired. Kiri smiled before he stepped out of the kitchen and concentrated. There was a torrent of light and water and before the Looper's eyes Kiri had changed.

Kiri was now cloaked in silver and black armor with gold trimmed sapphires set into his boots, gauntlets, and breastplate. A white cape with a gold rim curved around him protectively as the three horns circled his head like a crown.

"My real name is Miserea, Third Omni Water Lord of Dungeon World. It is a pleasure to greet you properly, Minato," he nodded ever so slightly and when Minato acknowledged it, Kiri shifted back into his more ordinary human form.

"You're taking Miserea's identity well," Tasuku noted. Minato shrugged in response.

"Nothing really surprises me anymore," Minato shrugged before Kiri brought out a few glasses of water and a single cup of soda.

"Thanks Kiri," Drum said as he took the single cup of soda, deciding to forgo his normal form for his teenage, or as Paruko called it his 'bishie', form (although Drum for the love of him never really figured out what that word meant). Everybody else simply took their glasses of water.

"So, you ready to explain what is going on?" Jack asked. Minato shook his head.

"I'm not good at explaining. My friend will do it." Minato got up and concentrated; it would have been impolite to use his Evoker here as Kiri's guest. He reached into his own psyche and found a dark spark in the depths of his soul. It took a little effort but Minato grasped onto that dark spark and pulled.

The others could feel something shift in the air, as all of them felt at an instinctual level that something was very, VERY wrong. The blue energy that heralded Orpheus' manifestation was completely absent: and instead next to Minato the space next to him seemed to recoil and shift. There was a small crack in what seemed to be reality itself that hovered and grew, before a pair of white gloved hands shot out of the crack and pulled.

"What the hell!?" Drum exclaimed as he bolted back from the table, shifting into his Omni-Lord form alongside Jack and Joker. Tasuku and Kiri backed away slowly with the latter shifting into his true form.

What emerged from the crack oozed wrongness from its very frame. The abomination that emerged from the crack in reality was cloaked in a black garb and with silver chains. Around his shoulders lay an array of coffins, creating an eerie and unsettling set of wings. Sheathed at its side was a silver blade with a serrated edge that seemed to devour the light around it. The figure's fanged fanged silver mask, its teeth as sharp as razors and a maw as black as the abyss itself opened to scream forth the wail of the-

"Ryoji, cut it out," Minato frowned. The mask snapped closed as it looked at Minato almost... petulantly?

"You're no fun," a voice echoed throughout the room. It was a voice that DID not match its owner, reminding one more of a high school play-boy rather than the grim harbinger of death itself.

"We're guests here. It's not polite to go full Thanatos when we're being hosted here."

"You always summon Orpheus Telos and not me," the grim figure huffed. "Am I not good enough for you anymore?"

"I didn't want to traumatize everyone within a mile radius of me. Now go into your other form so you can help me explain the Loops."

The figure, the one that Minato had called Thanatos, sighed in exasperation before he shifted forms. The were a pulse of blue energy as the wings, the sword, and the mask vanished into the ether, leaving a pale boy a few years older than Minato and Tasuku in its place.

"Yo," Ryoji waved at the shell-shocked Monsters and the lone human. "Did I give you a good scare? I've been practicing that for a while!"

"Ryoji..." Minato warned.

"Fine, fine. You better make it up to me though. Maybe if we did a Buddyfight together..."

"It's a waste of time."

"You're no fun as usual." Ryoji pouted before he turned towards the others. "Flies might fly in if your mouth is open like that." he winked.

Miserea was the first person to regain his composure, followed by Jack, Tasuku, and finally Drum.

"Did you just summon the 4th Knight of the Apocalypse to help you explain?" Drum asked. Ryoji tilted his head.

"4th Knight of the Apocalypse? No, you must have gotten confused with Pale Rider." At the blank expression from everyone else save Minato, Ryoji rolled his eyes.

"Really? You know, the Pale Rider from the Book of Revelations, 'and all of Hell followed him'. Does that ring a bell?" When everybody shook their heads Ryoji grinned.

"No," Minato shot back. Ryoji deflated.

"Come on, please? I never got to do this before! You let Orpheus do it earlier!"

Minato pinched the bridge of his nose, anticipating the headache that was going to happen. "Fine. But only do the voice. No transformation."

"I'll have to make do with that," Ryoji sighed as he cleared his throat.

"I am Thou. And Thou art I. From the sea of thy soul, I come. I am the end of the beaten path. I am the herald of the endless night. I am Thanatos, Harbinger of Nyx. From thine I was born, and by thy side I shall walk."

When those echoing words finished, Ryoji let out a mischievous grin, "Well, what do you think? Was I impressive or what?"

"...I expected the grim reaper to be, you know. A bit more grim," Drum deadpanned. "But anyway, about that explanation..."

"Alright then," Ryoji clapped his hands together as projection equipment manifested into the air around him and hummed to life. "So there's this tree called Yggdrasil..."

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Drum's head hurt from the sheer amount of information that Ryoji had thrown his way. He hadn't even understood half of the terms that Ryoji had used, like 'Fused Loop', 'Branch', 'Sakura Syndrome'... He wasn't really the kind of dragon who was interested in the tiny details. That was more of Axia's thing. He then realized that he would have to explain all of this all over again to the dragowizard, and resolved to get help from Tasuku.

"So basically," Tasuku summarized as he looked up from his notes. "The computer that runs the multi-verse is currently being repaired, and time is Looping to keep everything from falling apart?"

"Pretty much," Ryoji answered. "You, Drum, are the Anchor. You're essentially the guy who's keeping everything held together right now and you're always the one who remembers everything."

"Yeah I know... But, why me? Why not Gao?" Drum asked.

"Gao is 12 years old; he's not as stable as you are." Minato replied.

Ryoji sighed. "Listen up Drum. I know you're upset that your friend isn't Awake, that is that he doesn't remember anything. But it'll only be a matter of time before he does become Awake. You just have to be patient."

"I know..." Drum said. "It's just that..."

Minato sighed as he took off his headphones and laid a hand on Drum's shoulder, much to the dragon's and Ryoji's surprise. "I know it hurts; I've been in your situation before. Hang in there, you can pull through it. I know you're strong enough. When he does Awaken, it will be worth the wait. Okay?"

Drum flinched at Minato's touch before he sighed. "I... thanks, I guess." Minato nodded in response before he put went back to his seat.

Ryoji whistled, "Wow I'm jealous. Minato never did anything like that with anyone in Baseline. That's the original timeline by the way, just in case you forgot. Aand I think that's it."

"Not quite," Jack rumbled. "You still need to explain your powers. Tasuku's superiors are going to expect a report about your powers and capabilities. Although both Tasuku and I wish to tell some of them to shove it, we're quite curious ourselves."

"I can help explain it," Joker preened. "Even without these resets I've guided Miserea ever since Yamigeddo was originally sealed all those years ago. After searching my memories, I finally managed to find what I was looking for. Please correct me if I'm wrong, Minato."

When Minato nodded in agreement Joker cleared his throat.

"The thing that caught my interest was this 'Sea of Souls' that you kept talking about. I'm sure all Monsters have at least heard some equivalent of it. In Dungeon World, we call it Amala."

"You mean the Lunar Forest? The afterlife?" Drum inquired before he frowned. "Weird, I don't recall anything like that during Baseline. But right now I'm remembering it perfectly."

"That would be Loop memories," Ryoji explained. "Sometimes when a Loop starts your memories are different. Sometimes the changes are small, but other times you might find yourself in a completely different world!"

"Anyway, in Amala all who die have their souls pass through Amala to be reborn anew. Since Cerberus has told us that Orpheus is dead, here's my theory. Do correct me if I'm wrong." Joker replied. "You are either Orpheus reborn anew in this world, which I highly doubt, or you are somehow summoning Orpheus' spirit, or rather something that mimics his spirit, into the world around you."

"Partially correct," Minato acquiesced. "I draw Personas from the sea of souls, or rather the collective unconscious. Orpheus is as much of a part of me as my soul is. My ego and my very being chose to take that form and power. I did not know Orpheus had existed before in this world."

"So in other words: the reason why you can summon Orpheus is because... your mind fit that form better than other things?" Drum asked. Minato nodded.

"That's one way of looking at it," the blue-haired Looper replied before he looked at the time. "It's getting late. I think it would be best to meet up here again later. Will that be enough information to satisfy your superiors?"

"That should be enough. I'll just tell them that you don't really understand the exact details behind it yourself," Tasuku replied as he and Jack got up. "Thank you for the explanation. That cleared things up quite a bit."

"I'll teach you the Ping and how to create a Subspace Pocket. The Ping's useful for figuring out who is Awake during a Loop and the Pocket helps you transfer objects between Loops."

"Ugh, I'm going to lie down for a bit. My brain hurts..." Drum groaned. "But thanks anyway."

You three can stay here if you want," Kiri offered to Ryoji, Minato, and Drum. "Just give me a moment to clean up the guest beds. I'll make sure to give Gao a call to let him know."

"I'll pass. Gao's probably waiting at home for me. He's had enough time to cool down so I'll head back. Thanks for the offer though," the Anchor replied before he exited out of the house. As he looked up into the night sky Drum was filled with determination. Although there was a lot of pressure, being the anchor of his own native reality was definitely not something to be taken lightly, it was comforting that he was chosen for this job.

"Alright then Gao. I'll wait for you to wake up. And when you do, I'm going to show you how strong I've become." Drum clenched his fist and walked off into the night, his stride was a lot stronger and he stood a little taller as he vanished into the night.

[Digital Devil Saga], [Future Card Buddyfight]
Digital Devil Buddies (title assigned by compiler) – parts 1 and 2

Drum had lost count of the times that he had stood in front of the giant coliseum that was currently hosting the ABC Cup; a ploy to open up a portal to Darkness Dragon World and unleash an army to destroy the human world for Kyoya and his 'friends' to rule over. Unfortunately neither Kiri, Tasuku, or Jack were going to be Awake this time around. He had already met up with Axia and confirmed that had all of his memories intact. But there was something else that was bothering the Anchor ever since the Loop had started.

'I got five responses to the Ping early onto the Loop... So who the heck of the last two people?' he wondered to himself.

One of Gao's otherwise most admirable characteristics was going to be a bit of a pain. Had it been anybody else but Kyoya or that cheating scumbag Davide, Drum would have supported his partner's decision every step of the way. But this time was an exception.

"Gao I understand you want to talk to Kyoya, but trust me it never works out," Drum sighed.

"You don't know that! It could be different this time!" Gao protested. "I know him better than I did last time."

"That's what you said last time we got to this point in the Loop," Drum replied. "And the time before that. I know you want to try to change things but, you just have to just have to know when to cut your losses..."

"I'm not giving up on him."

"I'm not telling you to give up on him," Drum insisted as the two made their way closer to the complex. "I'm telling you to be patient. You won't be able to convince him right NOW, so just try again after the tournament."

Gao looked like he wanted to protest but he grudgingly accepted his Buddy's proposal as the two made their way closer to the tournament venue. But before either of them could even take another step forwards a familiar voice caught both of their attentions.

"Drum-kins! Gao-wow!" Axia called out the the blue dragon waved his hand frantically. Drum instinctively flinched as he anticipated the flying glomp from the affectionate dragon... which never came strangely enough. The red dragon took a moment to realize that, for once, Axia didn't shower him with affection for the first time that he consciously remembered.

"Hey, Axia!" Gao waved back enthusiastically as the monster trotted forward happily, "You look like you're in a good mood. What's the occasion? I thought you left to find your Buddy."

Axia looked positively radiant with joy as he got closer. "Yep! I did. I searched far and wide for so long, but I finally found my Buddy!"

Drum blinked as he processed what he just said, "Wait, what!?" Axia had never found his Buddy in Baseline, especially not this early on.

"Yep, I'll introduce you to him!" Axia chirped as he looked over his shoulder. "Hey, over here! Come and meet my friends!" he called out behind him. And Drum watched two figures emerged from the crowd: a boy and a girl that were at least a few years older than Gao.

The girl was dressed in light gray jacket with orange sleeves along with a medium length black skirt. A pair of sleek, knee-high boots with white stockings completed the look. Her eyes and hair were a deep onyx, almost like the night sky, and the gentle smile on the girl's pale face that set the dragon at ease for some reason that Drum couldn't really explain. She almost radiated a warm aura like the sun itself.

The boy wore what looked like an... armored jacket of some sort with a bright orange stripe emblazoned across the chest. A matching set of somewhat armored pants and steel-toed boots completed the ensemble, making the boy stick out like a sore thumb among the lightly clothed civilians around him. It honestly looked like the boy was geared up for combat rather than just a casual walk around the city. The silver hair and the piercing silver eyes did not really help. His skin was as pale as Sera's and there was nothing but a neutral frown on his face that betrayed no emotion.

But the one thing that caught Drum's attention was the simple black tattoo on the boy's left cheek: an eyeless maw with a fan-like crown on the top of it. It reminded Drum of a large geyser or fountain for some reason.

"So," Axia clapped his hands together. "This is my Buddy Serph and his sister Sera. Serph and Sera, these are my friends Gao-wow and Drum-kins."

"It's nice to meet you," the girl, Sera, replied as she smiled at Drum and Gao. "Axia told us a lot about you."

"Good things I hope," Drum chuckled.

"He did," the boy, Serph stated. "He has a very high opinion of you and he really cares about you as a friend."

"Aww, shucks Serph. You're making me blush," Axia chimed as he scratched the back of his head sheepishly. A flicker of a smile flashed across Serph's face before it vanished without a chase.

Sera laughed softly, "You kept talking about how excited you were to introduce us to your friends. I remember that you tried to get the both of us to practice-"

"Sera!" Axia cried out indignantly before the effeminate dragon pouted, "You promised that you wouldn't tell them."

"Sorry about that," the girl giggled. "But aren't you two supposed to head to the registration desk? Axia told us that you two were competing."

Gao shrugged, "No big deal. We still have plenty of time. Come one, this way! We might be able to get you some good seats. Then we can introduce you to the rest of the team!" with those words Gao charged off past the crowd and towards the place where the registration desk always seemed to be.

"Well then, we better catch up before Gao leaves us all behind... again," Drum sighed as he looked towards Serph, Sera and the exuberant Axia who was holding the hand the smiling Sera with one hand and the somewhat uncomfortable but tolerating Serph with the other. It had been a while since he last saw Axia this... bright and cheerful. He had been searching for a Buddy throughout most of the Loops and he had yet to find a single one. Until this time around at least.

Although Axia was way too clingy for his liking and he violated his personal space more times than he could count, Drum was happy for him.

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Ten to fifteen minutes later Serph, Sera, Drum, Axia, and Gao were making their ways down the halls in order to meet up with the other member's of Gao's Buddyfight team, the Baille du Sollei.

"You have no idea how long it took to convince Serphy to start playing Buddyfight!" Axia replied, not noticing Serph twitch at the use of his Axia-made nickname. "But thanks to Sera we're both in it to win it!"

"Maybe we'll be able to fight sometime!" Gao grinned, "Don't worry, Drum and I will be sure to give you a few pointers."

"Thank you," Serph acknowledged as he glanced around to ensure nobody else was around. "Axia told us that you had some... problems with Loops."

Drum blinked, "Wait, you two were the ones who sent out the other two Pings?" Serph and Sera nodded in response.

"I found out from them later after I became Serph's Buddy!" Axia cheered. "We were meant to meet!"

Drum rolled his eyes good-naturedly at Axia's comment. Serph and Sera seemed to allow Axia to have his fun, although Drum could tell that they both were enjoying just listening to Axia's jovial laughter and teasing.

"So, how are you two liking this Loop?" Gao asked casually as the five went down to the team waiting area.

"It's... a lot more peaceful than where we are from," Serph remarked. "We really like it a lot here."

"We don't get that many Loops like this," Sera chimed with a bright smile on her face. "So both Serph and I are going to enjoy this as much as we can."

"How was it like back in your home Loop?" Drum asked curiously. Serph and Sera's small smiles vanished nigh instantly and there was a stretch of silence between the group.

"We'd... rather not talk about it," Sera replied as she broke eye contact with Drum.

"Sorry about that," the Anchor apologized awkwardly as he looked ahead, desperate to change the topic. "Hey, isn't that Tetsuya and the others?" he asked, pointing towards a small group 4 teenagers and a single, tall, monster further down the hall. Among them was Gao's old friends Baku and Kurugu. But next to the tall monster was a smaller kind in a yellow hoodie and a white cap that was spun backwards.

"Alright let's introduce you to everyone else!" Gao cheered as went ahead. "Hey guys, over here!" he called out.

"Yo, Gao! What took you so long?" Tetsuya asked, his emerald eyes twinkling behind his golden hair. Accompanying him was a large, well-built... demon for the lack of a better term. He wore a short hooded shirt over his pink-skinned body with a spaded tail resting behind him. It was Asmodai, the Second Omni Lord.

"Sorry, Axia met up with us out front and we got carried away talking," Gao explained sheepishly. "I thought that I could get him and his Buddy some good seats."

"Zanya and Akatsuki already went ahead," Baku replied. "They wanted to scout ahead for our first few opponents. So, you mind introducing them?"

"Oh, right!" Gao realized. "Tetsuya, Asmodai, Kurugu, Baku this is Serph and Sera. Serph's Axia's Buddy."

"It is nice to meet the rest of you," Sera replied kindly. Serph nodded in acknowledgement but remained somewhat silent.

"Same here," Kurugu replied. "It's nice to see another girl around here."

"That's an... interesting mark you've got there Serph." Asmodai replied casually as he peered at the tattoo on Serph's face. Drum noticed that something was a bit off with the Magic World monster; he had his guard up. For some reason, that mark on Serph's face had bothered him immensely. But why?

"I think it looks pretty cool," Tetsuya chimed. "But come we better get a move on! The first match starts in a few minutes. We don't want to be late!"

"Lead the way!" Gao was already charging ahead of the group towards the team's pit. With a knowing groan the rest of Gao's friends quickly decided to follow after the energetic Looper.

"Oi, can I talk to Axia and Serph for a sec?" Asmodai called out before they left. "We need to do some catch up and talk about Magic World stuff!"

"Just make it quick!" Tetsuya called out as Sera was led away by Kurugu. "I'll make sure to save you a good seat!"

When loud chattering group of people finally moved elsewhere, the smile on Asmodai's face vanished instantly as he turned to Serph.

"Listen up, I'm not the kind of person to judge other people by their looks but that tattoo of yours.... It's awfully familiar to me," Asmodai stated coldly.

"I never wanted it," Serph replied flatly as he met the Monster's gaze without so much as flinching. "If I could have gotten rid of it for good, I would have already done so years ago."

"I already know WHAT Serph is," Axia hissed, shifting into his larger form. Gone was the small and petite dragon in the small black robe, and in his place was a lithe dragon battle-mage clad in black and gold armor. A winged staff was clenched in his right hand and a thick tome of spells lay in his left. "And I don't care. He's my Buddy, and that's all that matters to me."

Asmodai raised an hairless eyebrow in response. "Do you really know?"

"It was the first thing he told me when I first asked to be his Buddy. And I still agreed to it because in the end, what he was didn't matter to me. All that did matter to me was the kind of person he was. And if you so much as lay a finger on him..." A storm of arcane energy filled the air with latent electricity, surrounding the dragowizard like a cloak of tightly harnessed potential. "I will END you, Omni Lord or not."

"Relax, relax," Asmodai relented. "Like I said, I'm not the kind of monster to judge people at face value. But keep in mind, others might not take kindly to your friend here. Just wanted to give you a heads up, and to make sure you knew what you were getting into." With those words Asmodai put his arms behind his head and walked off to meet up with the others.

Axia glared at Asmodai once before shifting back into his smaller form. "I swear."

"...Thanks." Serph replied simply. Axia turned back with a bright grin on his face.

"No problem, anything for my Buddy~" the dragon cooed. "Come on, let's catch up with the others. They're probably getting sick of waiting for us." He grabbed Serph by the hand before leading the silver-haired Looper down the hallway. There was a small smile on Serph's face, one that was impossible to see if you didn't know where to look.

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The night sky was clear; a deep blue with countless pinpricks of light streaming down from above. No matter how many times Serph saw the miraculous dance of light and darkness above him, he never grew sick of it. In his home world all he knew was the endless silver rain of the Junkyard, where his tribe fought and annihilated its enemies. The night, Shade Time as they had called it back then, had no such things as stars; only a pitch blackness that swallowed everything around them. And even when he and his tribe escaped the Junkyard, all they ever saw was scorching black sun sending endless streams of corrupted data down into the surface of the dying earth.

The moon shone brightly overhead, sending its silver light cascading upon the grass outside of Gao's house while the celebratory party of passing the first round of the Gaen Cup was underway. Serph had chosen to forgo the ceremonies and simply enjoy the relative peace and quiet while it lasted.

Here, at least, there was no constant struggle for survival. The endless fighting, destroying, killing that had permeated every aspect of his home was notably absent. It was a pleasant feeling that he never truly gotten used to despite countless Loops. Sera was more accustomed to brightness of life: she freely made connections and with everyone around her and wove a network of friends nearly effortlessly. Serph, on the other hand, did not feel the need to forge so many intimate connections. The connections with the other members of his tribe: Gale, Agrilla, Cielo, and Heat were more than enough for him. They had conquered and fought side by side, back to back in the quicksilver rain. They had destroyed the other five tribes of the Junkyard to make their way to the world beyond. And even after that, they once more fought under a black and corrupted sun to reclaim and renew the barren Earth beneath them.

What bonds could he truly forge here in this place of peace that would be even comparable to the ones he had already made? Serph only knew the ways of the Junkyard, after all. He was more comfortable in the throes of combat than at a party. He had negotiated between tribes: but he never truly gotten accustomed to making conversations with the ease and grace that Sera had. He was born in the battlefield and lived all of his life there. Now that he came across a place almost completely devoid of combat, he was at a loss of what to do.

REND! SLAUGHTER! DEV-

Serph buried the spike of blood-lust and hunger with practiced ease. There was no need for fighting in this world; there was no enemy to fight yet. In this world he was not truly needed in the ways that his home world had required of him. He did not need Varuna this Loop.

The sliding door opened as a wave of sound was suddenly released into the night air followed by the creaking strain of the deck of the porch. Serph glanced behind him, expecting Axia or Sera to call him back in for something. He did not expect a very tall and broad red dragon that Drum had called his 'dad'. Fang Slade Terrestrial XIII resembled his son closely, although he was much taller Drum was. His skin, crossed and marred by countless scars was dull with age but was still just as strong, if not stronger. Fang's hair was a pale white hue and his eyes were a piercing silver. His armor was worn and rang softly as the older monster took a few steps forward. Serph's silver eyes met Fang's gray eyes for a short moment before the dragon broke eye contact first with a huff.

"You mind if you moved over? The others kids are making on heck of a racket inside, I just wanted to get some fresh air real quick before I headed back in." the dragon rumbled. Serph nodded as he gave the much larger dragon room. Fang rumbled as he appraised the silver-haired Looper before him.

"You know, your Buddy really admires you a lot. It's rare to see someone so devoted, and I've seen a lot!" the dragon laughed before his expression grew serious once more. "But I can see what he's talking about when I take a good look at you, kid."

"What do you see?" Serph asked. Fang huffed before obliging Serph's request.

"I see someone who had seen too much. You've got a warrior's eyes. Not only that, but you've got a leader's eyes. You've lived through things that most of the kids back over there could never really grasp. Makes sense though: the only fight majority of them have seen was Buddyfights. They haven't seen what real fighting's like. Not like how you and I know it."

"You don't know me."

"Of course I don't, we've just met each other after all. But I think we're similar enough for me to take an educated guess. Ruling the largest tribe in Dragon World isn't just about mediating arguments and doing ceremonies. Back in my day when my world was still in turmoil I personally destroyed six of the warring kingdoms there, all in the name of peace. I've had my fair share of blood and death, but then again I'm not an Asura like you are."

Serph sighed, "First Asmodai and then you. I was hoping that it wouldn't be so obvious."

"The Asura are the kind of stuff that parents used to tell their kids to scare them. After all, nothing's scares a bunch of hatch-lings like stories of shape-shifting cannibals. It's one thing for a Monster to obtain a human form... But a human obtaining a monster form? That's something else entirely. The brand on your cheek gives you away for those who know the signs. But those are only the ancient monsters. Most monsters these days only think of the Asura as the stuff of legends."

"Did you come to threaten me to not eat your son?" Serph asked flatly. Fang shook his head.

"As much as I give him trouble, my son's strong enough to take care of himself. He's really changed since the last time I saw him. Sometimes it's like I'm looking at a completely different person!" the dragon rumbled with a small bit of melancholy in his voice. "Besides, I'm a pretty good judge of character. You're not the type of person that would eat people left and right, and you're not the kind of person that would go back on his word. You only fight as a last resort when there is no other option, despite everything that you've gone through. Am I right?"

Serph acknowledged his assessment with nothing more than a small nod, and that seemed to satisfy the older dragon before something akin to a curiosity colored his expression.

"But, you know... Call it an old dragon's whim but I've never seen really seen an Asura in person before and I only heard second-hand information about their strength. Would you mind if you-?"

"I'm not the best at Buddyfight."

"I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in your true strength. I can give you a place to... stretch your legs if you know what I mean. We'll be back before anyone else knows it."

Serph considered the offer briefly and in the end, as much as he enjoyed the peace and quiet, both he and his Asura side both longed for combat.

"Very well," he sighed before Fang nodded in acknowledgment. The dragon laid a hand on his shoulder and they both vanished with a flurry of golden fragments.

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Serph found himself in a deserted plain in a completely different world. The air was fresh and tranquil; the atmosphere was still and silent. But there was something about this place that resonated deeply within Serph's unconscious mind. The ground was cracked and beaten as jagged mountains dotted the landscape and loomed over head.

"Welcome to Dragon World," a voice called out from the shadows. Serph turned behind him and we greeted by an intimidating sight. Fang stood unwavering before him with his dull armor shining the stars and moon. But his posture was upright and rigid and he looked towards Serph with a piercing gaze. "This place in particular used to be a desolate battle-field torn apart by the warring clans. I fought here more than my fair share of times personally, but nowadays nobody even comes near this place due to how many people died here. We won't be disturbed at all."

A corona of fire and energy engulfed Fang's entire body, wreathing his scarred physique in a brilliant nova of color. "It is customary for the person being challenged to take the first move. Your move, Asura."

Serph closed his eyes and exhaled. He turned his focus within, to the being that was as much of a part of Serph as his very soul and being was. He had long since accepted his other side, although he had not embraced the savagery and hunger that came hand in hand with his powers. There was no denying his hunger for battle; that there was some part of him that

longed for strife and violence. But with that acceptance came power and understanding. Varuna was always at his side and was eager to heed his call. He raised his right hand to the dark brand on his cheek and whispered a single mantra to shatter the chains.

"Om mani padme hum."

A vortex of water and ice formed instantly around Serph's glowing form before it too was rent asunder in a burst of light and force. When the storm parted Varuna, Lord of Ice and Water, roared in triumph to the moonlit sky. Its skin was black and blue in color with nimble digit-grade legs. Thick plates of sharp bone covered its arms, shoulders, and torso as a natural form of armor. Its eyes were hidden beneath a tall crown of shell and bone as the monster bared its sharp teeth with a hiss.

"Impressive," Fang remarked before Varuna surged forward. The armored monstrosity advanced with ground-breaking strides with each step creating a ring of frost with each foot fall. Within less than a second the Asura had closed the distance between the two combatants as it brought a chilling roundhouse kick to dragon's left side. The dragon did not even attempt to move out of the way; only bringing up an arm to lazily block the attack.

BANG!

There was a hiss of steam as Fang blocked the wild kick without so much as flinching before returning with a empowered strike of his own while Varuna was off-balance. The Asura redirected the momentum of his attack to quickly create distance between the two combatants, barely avoiding the otherwise devastating attack.

"Not bad," the dragon grunted as he shook his arm. The kick made by Varuna had left a patch of his arm burned raw by the icy cold that the Asura exuded but Fang merely pushed the pain aside as he waited to counter Varuna's next move.

Although the demonic Looper had many Loops worth of experience to draw upon, the fact that this impromptu duel was non-lethal made it exceedingly difficult for him draw upon his more destructive spells. Under the same reasoning, the blades that were stored in his arms couldn't be used in this scenario; all he could really do was to enhance his kicks and strikes with ice energy. It didn't really help that his current opponent currently utilized fire, his elemental weakness, to a masterful degree.

He drew upon the well of energy within himself as the surrounding air temperature dropped to near absolute zero, flash-freezing the ground around him before manifesting several spikes of pure ice from around the dragon. With but a single gesture the Asura sent the frozen projectiles through the air, whistling as they cut through the frigid air.

But such a simple attack was useless against Fang, who cloaked his body in a nova of heat and charged forwards against the storm of ice. The spikes, held together by Varuna's will were quickly pushed aside and shattered upon contact with Fang's empowered strikes. And before Varuna could even think of dodging, Fang had already gotten back into close-combat range with his fist raised. The Asura could only put up a hasty block before the attack slammed home with a sizzling impact.

Varuna was sent skidding backwards as he felt his arms almost shatter from the colossal attack. The corona of fire only made things worse. But it looked like his opponent hadn't remained completely unscathed.

"Ow!" Fang hissed as he shook his hand. "What is that armor even made out of?!" he cursed. Varuna looked down at where Fang's attack had landed and noted bloody marks where the dragon's unarmored fist had met his natural plated armor.

It took Varuna conscious effort to take his mind off of the tempting sight of fresh blood and refocus on the fight ahead of him. He could feel the hunger slowly begin to make its way through his mind; the urge to devour was growing stronger and stronger with each passing second. But for some reason he could not truly explain, it seemed to be... weaker than how he remembered it to be.

But when Fang charged again with a powerful stride all Varuna could afford to think about was the fight ahead. If nothing else, trying to defeat an opponent like this without resorting to his strongest skills was an interesting challenge.

...

"Will that be enough?" Varuna asked, his voice raspy and distorted. He had long since lost track of time that he and the dragon had spent in this abandoned battle-field. Fang blinked in confusion as he aborted the attack he was about unleash upon Varuna's scorched and beaten body. The dragon himself had his own wounds and bruises from the long and toiling battle between them.

"Is that all?" Fang asked, acting like he hadn't just spent the last four hours fighting fighting against against an the metaphorical bogeyman of the monster Worlds. The elder dragon hadn't even looked the least winded compared to the mentally fatigued Varuna.

"Any more and I might try to kill you," Varuna growled. "And once I get started, I may not be able to stop before one of us dies."

"Fine, we'll cut it off here," Fang nodded before he turned his attention elsewhere. "Although we've attracted quite an audience."

"Audience?" Varuna growled as he looked around before he froze. Along the very edge of his active awareness lay several scattered crowds of dragons, all of which had watched the titanic battle between the clan leader and the outsider.

Varuna hadn't truly noticed them before; such as his focus on the enemy before him and upon restraining the more savage impulses of his current form that he hadn't truly realized that they were there. All of the spectators had stayed just far enough to stay out of the collateral destruction and chaos and to avoid Varuna's passive instincts.

The collected dragons had bore an veritable array of weaponry and armors; indications of the various clan affiliations and races. And they now all cheered and hollered towards the end of the long and toiling fight, which filled Varuna with... something that he never felt before. Was

it pride? Triumph? He had previously fought solely to survive and to defend himself and those he considered his allies. It was an unknown feeling that was not completely unpleasant.

"We should probably head back soon, it looks like the sun's about to come up," Fang snapped Varuna out of his thoughts. The Asura nodded before he centered himself, and exhaled. The vortex of light reappeared as the identity of Serph reasserted itself over Varuna. And when the light cleared, the silver haired teen was himself once more; the only sign of his transformation was the dimming brand on his face.

Serph wobbled before a second before he reached into his Pocket and withdrew three crimson capsules. They were tiny things; large enough to only hold a few drops of crimson liquid but Serph swallowed them down regardless, ignoring the taste of iron and gel in his mouth. As he reoriented himself, he could feel the blood capsules begin lull Varuna into a deep slumber once more as the residual hunger vanished for the moment.

"The others are probably going to be panicking," Serph blanched as the elder dragon shrugged.

"They'll understand once we explain everything. Let's get going."

The dragon and human departed for the human world in a shower of golden sparks, leaving the spectators gossiping and chattering about what had happened.

Miscellaneous 15

[Persona 4], [Devil May Cry], [RWBY], [Kamen Rider: Decade]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

The Emerald Forest was a good starting-place for Loopers to team up with each other. So it was a bit of a surprise when four complete strangers to the branch had appeared using their own talents as their own. Which may have confirmed a few pings on the end of the Anchor.

"So," Ruby muttered, landing in the area. "We've got guests."

"I think they may have gone a bit too far off-course," Weiss replied, noticing their actions. "They're heading into the cave with the Scorpion Grimm."

Ruby got the idea and looked around. "Anyone else Awake?" she asked Weiss, who nodded and used enough fingers for six . "Come on. Let's find Yang and Blake...and in a way, Jaune's team."

"Actually," a voice said, catching their attention to see Jaune high up...and on top of Pyrrha's lance. "I'll be waiting for Pyrrha. You guys go on ahead to see who's entered THAT cave."

Both of them looked at each other and walked past him. Jaune's semblance this time involved sniping...which was ironic for him due to using a sword and shield.

At the cave, however, the four individuals locked eyes.

"Huh, if it isn't the Destroyer of Worlds himself," Dante replied, smirking at the magenta-clad Rider. "And who's your friend?"

The one in magenta looked at the younger male. "That's Asumu Adachi," he said. "He's the Anchor of the Hibiki Branch and just got the speech."

"Nice to meet you all in person," Asumu replied, bowing. "I'm one of the newcomers here...although it's weird hearing it from something not human...no offense."

"None taken, kid," Dante said. "Still, sense a bit of demonic energy from you. What are you?"

"I think we should find out later," Yu replied, as they noticed something glowing. "Right now, I think something found us."

Tsukasa gave it a look. "Looks like a giant stinger," he said. "I think it's best if we back away slowly...and get ready to fight."

Unfortunately, the Death Stalker had noticed them.

"And it looks like it wants to play," Dante replied. "What's the kid's talent?"

"Onigekidou," Asumu said, bringing out what looked like a Tuning Fork. "And unlike the other Riders, I don't sound off...I just make a sound." Indeed, as he brought out the Henshin Ouka Onkaku and struck it in one of the scenery, before letting it hover over his forehead. Indeed, the symbol of the Oni had appeared before he got caught in a purple fire before transforming into the Taiko Oni known as Hibiki.

"Had a feeling that's where the Demonic Energy came from," Dante said. "And a music-user, if what those drumsticks are anything to go by." He then brought out his Devil Arm, Nevan, the guitar scythe. "Let's rock this joint!"

Tsukasa rolled his eyes as Yu gave him a sympathetic glance.

"Better bring out my equipment," Tsukasa said before stopping and bringing out the card with his Rider Form from his Ride-Booker. "HENSHIN!" He then inserted the card into the DecaDriver.

KAMEN RIDE: DECADE
As nine translucent humanoid figures appeared around him, Yu searched through his sea of soul and brought out a familiar white-masked bancho-clothed blade-user.

"Izanagi," he said, "I'm going to need you to play distraction while the others get ready. As soon as I see the signal, I'm switching to Trumpeter."

"Trumpeter?" Izanagi asked him, just as surprised. "For curiosity's sake, what kind of plan would involve Trumpeter?"

"Let's just say we have a drummer boy in our midst," Yu replied. "And there's a crowd coming our way."

Izanagi noticed. "Oh, must be the locals. And you guys are putting on a show for them. I can do that."

Yu nodded as Izanagi charged alongside Dante while Hibiki and Tsukasa were working together.

"**KIBOJUTSU: REKKAKEN!**" Hibiki yelled, slashing the legs of the Death Stinger as Izanagi and Dante did the same on the other side, only with lightning instead of purple fire.

"Did that boy just use drumsticks to cripple said Death Stalker?" Blake asked them.

"My question is," Jaune said, "how did THESE guys get together in a team? I recognize Tsukasa, Dante, and Narukami, but the kid's a new one to me."

"All we know is that he just flew over our usual meeting spot," Weiss replied.

FORM RIDE: DEN-O AXE!

"And then they leaped into the Death Stalker cave," Ruby finished, noticing the pink-suited one change into a yellow bear-thing. "And...wow. Jaune, can he..."

"Turn into ten superheroes at once?" Jaune asked him. "Yeah. I ran into them once...Nora and Ren were with me. It was a bit of a stupid war..."

Pyrrha was surprised. "Wait, was it the one where your weapons were androids and..."

ATTACK RIDE: TSUPPARI

Before either of them could explain, the sheer force Decade used when Death Stalker had been flipped over and caused a small crater, causing a bit of surprise in them and some excitement in Nora.

"DO IT AGAIN! DO IT AGAIN!"

However, it was time for them to end it.

"Time to change," Yu said to Izanagi.

"It was fun while it lasted," Izanagi replied before changing into Trumpeter, who got his trumpet out.

Dante then brought Nevan out of scythe mode and into guitar mode. "Emerald Forest, are you ready to rock!"

After changing back into Decade, he then looked at Hibiki as he brought out a certain Final Form Ride card.

"This might tickle a bit, Asumu-san," he said to the younger Hibiki as he put the card into the DecaDriver.

FINAL FORM RIDE: HI-HI-HI-HIBIKI!

"Ah, I was told about this," Hibiki replied as he got ready. Tsukasa then changed the Purple Oni's form into a hybrid of the Akanetana and the Onigekidou drum. As it flew upwards, it then changed into the drum as it neared landing on the belly of the Death Stalker.

FINAL ATTACK RIDE: HI-HI-HI-HIBIKI!

Decade then brought out his own pink Ongekibou Rekka and landed on the Death Stalker before striking the Onigekidou drum in a perfect melody.

Dante, seeing his opportunity, had managed to bring out Nevan, hooked it onto the giant scorpion Grimm and played a few notes of his own, bringing a few shocks.

"Let's go, Trumpeter!" Yu yelled, breaking the Judgment card, his demeanor rising as it had struck the Death Stalker with its ice attack before playing a tune through the Mind Charge, increasing their own attacks as well as Dante's due to being more electric-based with Nevan.

Ruby and the others were amazed, but Ren and Jaune had to bring out their own instruments.

"Hey, we're not missing out on this!" Jaune yelled. "Come on, Ren!"

Ren nodded as Nora already brought out drumsticks, surprising Pyrrha. However, Jaune brought out a trumpet while Ren had a guitar.

"Where did they get those?" Pyrrha asked the others. "And why..."

"They planned to give you a Keytar," Ruby replied. "You weren't awake that Loop...although where did Nora get that Taiko Drum?"

Indeed, as they were together, Nora, Jaune, and Ren set up shop as they managed to add to the momentum that was the Death Stalker's final resting place...as Decade made the final strike...before the Grimm died of sound overload, the Onigekidou changing back into Hibiki in the process.

"We'd make an encore," Dante replied, "but there's a shrine nearby we're supposed to find...so, would any of you young ladies lead the way?"

"Follow us," Blake said. "And put your stuff away."

De-henshining, Asumu asked Tsukasa, "Are all these Fused Loops this crazy?"

"They get crazier," he replied. "You might want to settle yourself first. We've got a long way to go."

[Persona 3], [Future Card Buddyfight]
Having Death as your Buddy – part 5
Author: Solaris Requiem

"I'm happy that the others managed to convince you give Buddyfight a chance," Baku said when he met up with Minato a few days later. The blue-haired teen was accompanied by Ryoji, who chose to dress in his usual white-long sleeve shirt with a yellow scarf. The former Persona/Looper had introduced himself as Minato's cousin from abroad, although that hadn't fooled some of the more cannier monsters. They all knew that there was something different about Ryoji, but none of them seemed to want to bring it up.

"It took me hours to get him to try it out," Ryoji sighed. "Eventually the only reason why he agreed was to get me to shut up about it."

Minato refused to comment on that, and instead chose to fidget with the Core Deck Case that Tasuku had delivered to him a few days ago, courtesy of the Buddy Police for assisting them in confronting the masked thief. Apparently when a game started, the deck itself would transform into a Core gadget that would allow for instantly drawing, shuffling, and playing. Minato, for the love of him, couldn't figure out why such technology was wasted on what was fancy shuffling machines. He could probably come up with several different applications alone that were more... useful.

"So, do you have an idea on what World you wanted to use?" Baku asked as he pulled out a large tool-box full of cards. "I've got mostly Dragon World cards but there's a few-"

"No need," Minato shook his head. "I already have something." Baku looked disappointed but perked up.

"You mean you already made your deck?" the teen asked. Minato blinked in confusion.

"Isn't that what you're supposed to do?"

"Well, yeah you can build your own deck. But usually its better for a specialist to take control of it. I built Gao's deck myself, and he's been doing okay. Although apparently Drum's been kicking his butt every night when they play together," Baku sighed. "Mind if I take a look? I can give you a few good pointers if you like."

With a shrug of indifference Minato pulled out his deck and handed it over. The deck-builder accepted it, removed the deck from its case, and fanned through it on a nearby table. Kurugu, Gao, Tetsuya, and the others peered over Baku's shoulder to take a look at Minato's deck.

"W-What kind of deck is this?!" Baku gaped as he examined each card closely. Minato frowned.

"Is there something wrong with it?"

"I've never seen this World before," Baku frowned as he sorted through the array of colorful cards. "I don't even recognize half of the monsters or spells here. Where did you get these?!"

Minato frowned as he looked the offending cards and sighed. When Tasuku had given him the deck case, there was a full set of blank cards included. On a whim, he tried to imbue some of the blank cards with his various Personas, much like he did with Nihil Weapons in Baseline. The results were... unexpected.

Rather than absorb the Persona, the cards created a link that he could use to partially invoke them without the use of an Evoker. The exceptions were with Orpheus Telos and Thanatos; all that really did was to imprint an image of them onto the card for later use. The same applied to the spells, if he concentrated hard enough. He was able to replicate his own spell in card form by channeling enough energy into them, although he had required help from Orpheus.

Ryoji winked impishly, "That's for us to know and you not to. I will say this though: these are the only ones of their kind. They're pretty much irreplaceable."

That was a flat-out lie of course, Minato could simply create new cards regardless. But none of them need to know that.

"I call dibs, yo!" Tetsuya bounced around. Gao frowned.

"No fair! I wanted to fight him." Gao frowned.

"You can go after! That alright with you Minato?" Tetsuya asked with his eyes shining. Minato sighed the sigh of the damned and nodded.

"Sweet! Let's get started!" Tetsuya cheered. "Meet ya at the stadium!" he called as he ran off.

The blue haired boy felt a headache coming along before he and the others followed the enthusiastic teen towards the school's built-in stadium.

...

"It looks like we have quite a fight on our hands!" a pink-haired girl cheered as she floated around the stage in what, literally, was a UFO. "This is your favorite announcer Paruko live from Aibo Academy! It looks like we have quite a show on our hands. The lone transfer student, Minato Arisato will face off against the dance-loving Tetsuya Kurodake!"

"You ready for this? Your Buddy ain't here yet." Tetsuya asked the Looper as they stood on opposite sides of the battle field. The arena appeared to be made from solid, aged, stone with 4 sets of platforms on each side of the field. Minato and Tetsuya stood at the ends while three smaller platforms would be where they would call monsters into battle.

"I'll get him when I need him. Let's get this over with," Minato sighed. Tetsuya laughed while his Buddy Asmodai stood next to him with an easy-going grin on his face.

"Come on, let's get started!" Tetsuya cheered as he brought his deck out. "Let's all dance together! Luminize, Dancing Devils."

The deck morphed into a pair of headphones with a blue jewel set on the right side of it. The ten brought his hand to his ear and summoned forth five glowing cards before him. "You're up!"

"Do I have to do the... chant?" Minato sweat-dropped. When Tetsuya nodded Minato groaned.

"Come on, have fun with it! It's your first time playing." Tetsuya encouraged Minato. The blue-haired teen sighed before he brought out his own deck. It took a bit for Minato to come up with something, but there were words that had stuck in his head for as long as he could remember. The words that the Avatar of Nyx told him and his allies atop Tartarus, and before he realized it the words spilled from his lips like water.

"The Arcana are the means by which all is revealed. Luminize, Arcana Zero: The Fool." The deck morphed and shifted, creating a familiar gun with a short silver barrel with a cold metal grip. Minato was comforted by the familiar weight of an Evoker before he holstered it on his side.

"Both Core Gadgets are now out!" Paruko cheered. "Now, let's start!"

A green emblem, depicting a six-pointed star with two staves crossed in the center, appeared upon Tetsuya's side of the field. "Magic World's ready, yo!"

And upon Minato's side something... strange occurred. There was the sound of shattering glass as an emblem materialized into existence. It was a monochromatic mask that blazed with ethereal fire. "The Sea of Souls."

The sight of a new flag heralding a brand new world seemed to send the entire area into a storm of gossip and chatter.

"Let's go! Raise the flag!" Paruko cheered as she hovered around the arena. Her Buddy Monster and cameraman Takosuke filmed the surroundings as the match began. "It seems that Minato's brought about a brand new world to start off this match. Let's see where this takes us. It's his move first!"

"Hermes to the center." Minato intoned. There was a flash of azure light before a figure emerged. It bore a caged golden helm with blade-like wings of brass that shone in the lights before it. It was Hermes, the Persona of his friend Junpei. "Attack."

With the command Hermes shot forward with light steps. Sparks of flame echoed as its metallic feet surged forward, leaping across the stone platforms with both of its wings raised to strike. But Tetsuya was more than ready for that.

"I cast Magical Goodbye!" Tetsuya called out as one of the cards in his hand began to glow. It expanded into a complex mandala of golden light that revolved around his palm that the boy threw at the approaching monster. The light bound and constricted the conjured Persona before it shattered into a spark of light, returning back to Minato's hand instantly.

"MOVE END" the battle system announced.

Tetsuya grinned as he drew two cards, sending a card from his hand and into his Gauge. "I call Valefar to the right and Beleth to the center." With two flashes of light, the two Magic World Monsters appeared. One was dressed like a rock-star with a electric guitar in hand while the other was a winged humanoid with heavy armor. "Attack the fighter!"

As the two monsters closed in, Minato glanced at his hand before he sighed. There was no use wasting some of the cards he had now.

Valefar brought forth two curved daggers and slashed at Minato's body with a battle-cry, trisecting his body for a split second and leaving static in their wake and reducing his life points to nine. But Minato didn't even flinch at the attack, he had felt worse during his time.

"Now begone!" Beleth shouted as he raised his weapon high to crush Minato. But Minato was already ready with a counter spell.

"Tetrakarn." he invoked simply as one of the cards in his Gauge burned away to fuel his spell. A crystal shield of energy formed around him just as he swung its weapon down, creating sparks of light and energy. The shield exploded violently, instantly lacerating the attacking monster.

"Oh that's just-" Beleth began before his form shattered into orange sparks.

"Not bad, yo!" Tetsuya grinned as Minato began his turn. "You're pretty good at this, for a beginner."

Minato nodded in response to the compliment before he called forth two more monsters. "Hermes, to the center. I pay one Gauge to call Penthesilea to the right." With two flashes of light Hermes appeared in his golden-winged glory. Accompanying him was an armored empress with a sharp rapier and a dagger. The golden crown on Penthesilea's head glittered in the light.

"Execute Valefar," Minato commanded. The female Persona slashed its weapons horizontally, leaving a blizzard in its wake. The guitar-slinging demon was frozen instantly, his body encased in a tomb of ice. With but a single gesture, the ice shattered instantly and Valefar was destroyed without a single trace. "Hermes, Penthesilea, attack."

The two Personas worked in concert with each other as they charged forwards against the defenseless Tetsuya. Penthesilea brought down her rapier and dagger in concert, slashing Tetsuya apart like rice-paper before Hermes soared through the air and slashed him apart with his wings. Tetsuya cried out in pain as his life total was brought down to five in a single move.

"Your turn," Minato stated as Tetsuya got up.

"Let's get started!" Tetsuya grinned as he began casting cards. To Minato's amusement and bafflement the young teen began to dance.

"I Buddycall Asmodai to the center and discard one card! When that happens, one of your monsters is destroyed!" he cheered as his life jumped back to six. "Thanks to Buddycall, I get one life back."

"Let's do this!" Asmodai cheered as he leapt onto the stage before he teleported behind Hermes and wrapped his arms around the bladed Persona.

BAM!

Minato winced when he watched Hermes get supplexed into the ground but Tetsuya was not done yet. The teen brought back Beleth from the grave before summoning ANOTHER Valefar back onto the field.

"Asmodai, atta-" Tetsuya began before Minato cut him off, already using two gauge to cast another spell.

"Anima Freeze," Minato intoned. The spell card shifted into an orb of multicolored light that burst instantly, bringing all of the other monsters down to their knees in exhaustion. None of them would be able to attack him this turn. Minato let out a sigh of relief before he turned to Tetsuya.

"You having fun yet?" the boy asked him. Minato blinked before he shrugged, beginning his turn while doing so.

"It was fun while it lasted," Minato replied as he looked at his hand before the smallest hint of a smile showed up on his face. He drew his evoker and pointed it at the side of his head, much to the shock of the monsters and humans present.

"H-Hey!" Tetsuya gaped. "Dude, it's just a game! There's no need to-"

Minato was starting to get annoyed by the gossiping and talking before he decided to let his actions speak for him. "Orpheus."

BANG!

There was the sound of shattering glass as Orpheus Telos manifested itself onto the field with a shower of light, Penthesilea shifted into a shard of light as itself and two other cards from Minato's hand entered Orpheus' soul. There was no need for-

"You're Orpheus?" Valefor gaped as he got up. "That famous Danger World musician?! I'm a huge fan! Can I have your autograph please?"

Both human and persona were confused by the sudden turn of events and responded with the exact same statement.

"What."

[Nocturne], [??? (spoiler)]
(no title)
Author: Evilhumour

Naoki frowned as he Woke up as in a common looking bedroom, dressed like an American youth. Although he was male, he could tell by the brim of his hat it was pink, something that he knew was usually reserv-

BANG

Before he could even react, two small beings appeared into existence in front of him, one male and one female.

"I'm Cosmo!" The male figure with green hair said with a big grin.

"I'm Wanda!" The female figure with pink hair said with equal glee.

"And we're..."

A massive sign blinked into being, causing Naoki to shield his eyes. What was said on the sign was repeated by the creatures.

"***Your fairy godparents!***"

All Naoki had to say to this was, "Wut?"

[Devil Survivor 2]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Daichi and Hibiki gazed at the harbor as the scene before them played out. There might not have been any Septentriones (Saiduq had not been seen at all), but them being replaced by Lovecraftian horrors wasn't a fair trade-off.

"I have to ask, Hibiki. Why did this seem like a good idea?"

"I honestly thought that Shakko would be strong enough."

"And when it was losing, you decided to get Godzilla to join in the fight!?"

In the harbor, the materialized Dragon Stream and the King of Monsters itself were fighting against what they figured to be the Amala Branch's version of Cthulhu.

"To be fair, Godzilla was already here, so I just asked."

"Wait, he's a Looper?"

The massive Anchor flashed them a thumb's up before unleashing a stream of nuclear fire on the horror.

"I'm planning to ask for an autograph after the fight."

"Of course you are."

[Nocturne], [SMT IV], [The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron], [The Fairly OddParents!]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

"Soooo...science." Naoki grinned. "Second nature to you, huh? But all this tech, and you're *still* stuck with that hair."

"Oh, shut up," Isabeau muttered, trying in vain to get her hair to stop sticking down. "Need I toss the Fair Folk you've been with this whole time into an iron cage to make you stop jests of that caliber?"

"Noooooooo! Not prison!"

Both Anchors looked over to see Cosmo in an orange prison uniform, begging on his knees.

"I can't ever go back! You can't make me!"

[Persona 3], [Future Card Buddyfight]
Having Death as your Buddy – part 6
Author: Solaris Requiem

"What the heck is wrong with you?!" Paruko berated Minato. "I was broadcasting that live! Who in the world shoots themselves in the head with their Core Gadget?!" The blue haired Looper's patience was beginning to unravel with each passing second. There was never this

much of an outcry before when he used his Evoker in other Loops, and it was slowly but surely getting on his nerves.

Minato's primary Persona was awkwardly signing autographs to the various monsters that had suddenly shown out of the blue during the hasty intermission; the human could tell that Orpheus was not totally pleased by the sudden influx of fans. The Persona had already signed ten or so things already from recordings to armor to instruments; the line of monsters was just starting to get shorter and shorter.

Although apparently the real Orpheus had died, the other monsters didn't seem to care all that much about it. The mere fact that Orpheus was there in some way, shape, or form was more than enough for them.

"You're lucky I managed to censor it in time, or else I would have gotten dozen of complaints from it! What the heck is wrong with you!?" Paruko continued before she took a moment to catch her breath. Her eyes were bloodshot and her hair was frazzled.

"You done yet?" Minato asked bluntly. "The Evoker is harmless. It doesn't have any bullets. I don't see the problem with using it."

"The rest of us do! You're the only one who has absolutely no freaking problem SHOOTING YOURSELF IN THE SKULL!!!" Paruko screamed. Minato winced at the volume before the announcer threw her hands into the air. "You know what, forget it. Just don't do it again. Just Buddycall your Buddy without using that thing next time!"

Although Minato couldn't really care less about what the announcer thought, he didn't want to sit through another ear-piercing lecture. It was just a waste of time to him. Therefore, the blue-haired teen sighed before tentatively agreeing.

"Good!" Paruko huffed before she reascended in her UFO. "Now that that's taken care of. Let's get back to the Buddyfight!"

Orpheus finished signing off the last item and the monsters had dispersed nearly instantly, happy to have gotten what they wanted. Valefar handed his autographed memorabilia to Tetsuya for safe-keeping before resuming his spot on the battlefield. He at least had the decency to look a bit sheepish.

"Sorry about that," the leather-jacketed monster apologized. "Your music inspired me to learn how to play guitar so I was a bit... excited to see you. So, thanks."

Orpheus blinked before he shrugged. "You're welcome," he replied before the battle started again.

"Alright then folks!" Paruko announced once she managed to calm herself down, "We're back at Aibo Academy from that intermission. There was some technical difficulties so the Buddyfight was paused for a few minutes. Now let's check out what kind of Buddy Minato has with him with the takoscope!" The announcer pulled out a pink scanner and pointed it at Orpheus' floating form.

"Master of Strings, Orpheus Telos. Attribute is Arcana, His statistics are... zero?" Paruko frowned before she hit the scope on the side and re-examined it, "Ah, there we go! Size is 2. He also has 7000 attack, 3 critical, and 8000 defense. He also has two abilities plus Soul Guard. His first ability, Cipher, allows him to…. use the highest values and the abilities of the three monster cards in his soul?! What the heck?!"

"You've got to be kidding me." Tetsuya protested, "That's completely insane, yo!"

"Not my problem." Minato shrugged. "Execute Asmodai." The crimson Persona raised his hand and clenched. A jagged prison of ice engulfed the demon lord instantly within a millisecond, engulfing the monster completely in the enchanted ice. A single motion and the ice shattered instantly, dissolving Asmodai into countless fragments of light.

"Asmodai!" Tetsuya cried out in alarm at the destruction of his best friend.

"Whenever Orpheus destroys a monster, his second ability Victory Cry activates. Minato gains one life and two gauge! That's one insanely powerful Buddy Monster!" Paruko commented as Tetsuya and his monsters looked more and more unnerved.

Minato did not even hesitate for the smallest of moments. "Attack."

The crimson Persona leaped into the air, his lyre raised for a crushing blow. With the sound of shattering concrete, the blunt instrument crashed into Tetsuya, bringing his life down to 3.

"Cipher, activate." Minato intoned. "Double attack." For a second, Orpheus' form shifted briefly, revealing a demonic swordsman wielding two sharp blades, before the Persona brought his lyre around for a second attack.

"That’s not cool, yo!" Tetsuya cried out before the heavy lyre slammed into his body one more time. His life total crumbled to zero and the Magic World flag shattered into countless motes of light.

GAME OVER! WINNER: MINATO ARISATO! The battle system announced. The monsters on both side of the field vanished in a sparkle of light and energy before Minato exhaled.

"Good game," Minato replied out of politeness. Tetsuya shook his head to clear the stars in his vision before getting back on his feet. But despite that, there was a huge grin on his face.

"That was a blast! Let's have a rematch again soon!"

Minato blinked in confusion before he nodded. "I guess if you want to...."

…

“Alright it’s our turn up next!” Gao cheered as he and Drum took the stage. The dragon couldn’t help but feel nervous at the opponent that he was facing up next. He knew that Minato had vastly superior experience to the both of them, and if Orpheus was an indication to how powerful the Looper’s cards were he wasn’t sure if Gao would be able to win this early in the Loop.

Of course, that was only half of the problem. The thing that concerned the dragon the most was the person standing next to Minato.

“It’s about time that you decided to let me have some fun too!” Ryoji yawned, stretching his arms lazily. “This was the main reason why I convinced you to start playing after all!”

“I thought you wanted me to ‘come out of my shell’,” Minato deadpanned. Ryoji’s grin became cat-like and mischievous.

“It was killing two birds with one stone.”

Paruko hovered next to Ryoji with a slight twitch in her brow, most likely due to Ryoji’s previous attempts to flirt with her. “No humans other than the fighter are allowed on the field. Please go back to the stands.”

Ryoji had the gall to wink at Paruko teasingly. “Now, now. Although I might look the part, I’m not actually human.” The stadium erupted into whispers and chatter at Ryoji’s casual remark. “It’s just that my true form is a bit too scary for most people to handle. I don’t want to give people nightmares tonight! Pleasant dreams on the-”

“Ryoji.”

“Fine, fine…. You’re no fun as usual. Come on, let’s get started!”

Minato sighed the sigh of the damned once more before Paruko took her position above the fight.

“Alright! For our next match we have the loner transfer student Minato Arisato playing against the blazing hot newcomer Gao Mikado and his Buddy Drum! As you folks tuning in might have known, Gao’s a new player but he has yet to lose a single game! Will this be his first loss? Let’s find out!”

With a practiced motion Gao’s Core Deck began to shine. “This dragon deck’s going to go out with a bang! Luminze, Dragon Blast Fury!” With a flash of light the deck morphed into a gray belt and materialized around Gao’s waist. The deck itself became a solar crest with a shining jewel on Gao’s right hip.

Minato closed his eyes and exhaled, bringing out his deck once more. How the heck did they say stuff so cheesy and not even flinch? Whatever, it was his turn to get this over-with.

“The Arcana are the means by which all is revealed. Luminize, Arcana XIII: Death.” With that declaration, the deck case shifted into the special Evoker that he had been using during the last match.

“Hey, you have more than one deck?!” Gao asked. Minato shrugged before Ryoji grinned.

“Not really. We just ended up changing a few cards around! We didn’t change that many things!”

“Alright then. Raise the Flag! Dragon World’s ready!” Drum bore a massive blue flag with a red and green coat of arms emblazoned on it. The dragon swung the flag left and right before planting it into the ground with almost casual ease.

The emblem of the Sea of Souls materialized next in its ethereal glory, pulsing with an unknown power.

“Sea of Souls. Let’s get started.” Minato declared before he concentrated, reaching deeply within his soul for the link between Ryoji and himself.

There was a pulse of ebony light that pulsed and swirled around Ryoji’s human form. It swallowed the scarfed boy instantly before an eerie howl resonated throughout the room.

The cocoon of black light and energy burst and Thanatos, Harbinger of Nyx stepped forwards with its serrated blade drawn. The chains that bound the wing of coffins to Thanatos’ shoulders rattled as the Persona brought forth the scream of the damned.

“W-What is that thing?!?!” Paruko stuttered. “That’s your other Buddy?! The grim reaper?!”

Thanatos huffed. “I told you my form was scary. But anyway, it’s Gao’s turn, right?”

“Yeah!” Gao took a moment to regain his confidence. “I call Extreme Sword Dragon to the left!”

With a flash of light a massive dragon lumbered into existence. Polished silver armor covered the maroon scaled monster as is hefted a large zweihander with both hands. The silver knight’s helm that it wore on his face was damaged by the scars of battle, revealing a single slitted eye brimming with intelligence and experience.

“Attack the fighter!” Gao called out. Extreme Sword Dragon stepped forward before it stopped. It was only then that he noticed the silver mask and the black cloaked specter of death standing right next to Minato. Thanatos snapped his jaws menacingly while Minato just looked as apathetic as usual.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” the dragon turned to Gao, gesturing over to the lingering harbinger of destruction that was lounging next to Minato. “That’s Thanatos, the hunter of life and the bringer of death. I have my pride as an Armordragon but I’m not suicidal.”

“He can’t attack you yet, you’ll be fine!” Gao reassured the dragon. Extreme sighed before he spread his wings. “Very well.”

The dragon charged across the battlefield with a ground eating stride, his wings lifting his body upwards to ascend to the fighter’s platform. He brought his heavy blade downwards to cleave the boy in two, but Minato’s well-used reflexes kicked in and he dodged out of the way of the attack. The blade bit into the platform itself and scattered holographic shrapnel.

“You’re not supposed to dodge it!” Gao protested. “You have to take the attack unless you cast a spell card!”

“Ah…” Minato replied as looked at the dragon’s armored form and the blade that was just as big as he was. Extreme was trying very hard to ignore Thanatos’ cold glare. The Persona twirled his sword idly, itching to cut the dragon into a dozen pieces. “Sorry about that. I dodged out of reflex. You can try again. I won’t dodge.”

Extreme raised his sword once more and slashed Minato across the chest, leaving sparks of light where the blade connected. His life total dropped from ten to seven in an instant. The dragon quickly resumed his position on Gao’s side of the field. Thanatos gnashed his steel teeth together before he drew a claw across his own throat.

“My turn,” Minato sighed as he drew his card. He frowned momentarily before he tossed the card into his Gauge and drew another one.

“Abel to the right.” he intoned as a single card from his gauge burned away. With a swirl of light, an ethereal warrior materialized onto the battlefield. It hovered like a spirit in the air, clad with azure armor and a tattered cloak. A short mane of black and crimson hair jutted from the back of the warrior’s triangular mask. It bore a large broadsword that glowed with radiant power.

“Abel’s Kindred Blood activates. I call Cain to the center from my hand for free.” There was a flash of light before a warrior in heavy violet armor emerged. Like the most of the other monsters that Minato had summoned, Cain’s face was obscured by the tall tower-like helm it bore.

“Cain, attack Extreme Sword Dragon.” Minato commanded.

Cain nodded once in acknowledgement before it kicked off from the platform it was standing upon, immediately entering close combat with Extreme. The dragon swung his massive sword towards the Persona, but it failed to even scratch on Cain’s armor. The Persona lumbered forward and with speed that belied its form, parried the strike and sent Extreme Sword Dragon skidding backwards.

There was a whirl of machinery before Cain’s left arm shifted and, bringing forth a large laser cannon that hummed with energy. Cain raised the gun upwards and fired, launching a bolt of energy that pierced through the dragon’s body. The dragon couldn’t even say a single word before his body dissolved into motes of energy.

“When Abel is on the field, Cain gets the Penetrate ability. He deals two damage to you.” Cain aimed the gun once more towards Gao and fired off another bolt of energy. There was a flash of light as the bolt passed through Gao, leaving static and energy in its wake.

Drum grit his teeth, unable to do so much as interfere, as Gao’s life total dropped to eight. The red haired boy regained his footing in a millisecond, but Minato was not done yet.

“Abel gets Double Attack when Cain is on the field. Attack the fighter.”

Abel bared its sword before it vanished for his spot. The moment that Gao blinked, Abel was already in front of him with his sword raised to strike.

“Cast: Green Dragon Shield!” Gao cried out. Abel’s blade slammed into the conjured shield with an explosion of force, nullifying the attack and converting into energy, sending his life total to nine.

“Double Attack.” Minato commanded as the Abel brought his sword down upon Gao once more. This time, Gao did not have a spell to counter Abel’s strike. The glowing blade cut Gao’s body in half with a single swing, sending his life point total to six.

MOVE END! The system announced as Abel resumed his previous position. Gao panted in exhaustion before Drum helped him up on his feet.

“You alright?” the dragon asked. His partner nodded.

“I’ll be fine, let’s do this!” Gao grinned as he drew his next card. “We can still win this!

Minato sighed as he watched Gao take his next turn. Although he wouldn’t admit it, he was starting to have fun. Just a little.

[Persona 4], [Super Smash Brothers]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

In a certain house in Inaba, Yu Narukami had sat down in his room and waited. It was raining and almost nearing midnight, so he was in front of the TV to see if the Midnight Channel had something interesting.

The thing about the Loops is that you know who's targeted and how to prevent it, but some habits are hard to break. That, and some results tend to be quite...interesting.

When Midnight came, the results were...unexpected.

Especially when he noticed two slashes turn into fire, signifying a familiar branch.

…

As Marth, Roy, Ike, Lucina, Robin, and Corrin had fought on the Coliseum stage, a fog had been seeping in without them noticing. By the time they did, they had noticed that the stage had changed into a complete yellow setting...one with three TVs.

As they were stunned at the turn of events, it was easy for a figure to walk up and strike Roy from behind, surprising the others.

"IZANAGI!" the familiar voice yelled. As the Persona had shown up, it struck Marth and Ike with lightning and rammed Lucina, Robin, and Corrin with cleaver, knocking them out.

Indeed, the figure that had appeared in the Midnight Channel...was himself.

YU NARUKAMI MAKES HISTORY

Indeed, as Yu had appeared on the Battlefield, glasses on, he was showing his fighting ability on the stage.

"Whoa, dude," he heard Yosuke's voice say. "How'd you get in THIS fight?"

"I don't know," his own said. "The fact that it appeared on the Midnight Channel made me a bit wary."

"Still, this is amazing, Sensei," Teddie's voice replied. "You get to fight in Smash!"

Indeed, he was up against the fighters of Smash Bros. Specifically, seven of the first twelve as he was going through the competition.

"Although I'm a little suspicious," Yukiko's voice said. "The last 'fighting tournaments' involved with the Midnight Channel didn't exactly sit well."

"Yeah," Kanji's voice added, "I kind of thought you were in danger as well."

"He still is," Naoto's voice replied. "These aren't exactly Shadows he's facing, and a lot of them have several years of experience over him. It's best to be on guard for the fight ahead, Sempai."

"Danger aside," Chie's voice said, "I can't help but feel jealous."

"Not everyone's a battle maniac, Chie," Yosuke retorted.

"WHAT WAS THAT!?!" The response when he went up against Samus matched Chie's own voice as he nearly ducked...but Yosuke didn't sound as lucky.

"NOT THE FACE!"

"Either way," Rise's Voice said, "we'll still be rooting for you, Sempai."

However, the next part was a cause for alarm as the Midnight Channel was shown as a stage.

"Okay, now I'm starting to see why Naoto's on guard," his voice said. "I'm fighting on the Midnight Channel."

"Oh, this is going to bring back memories," Yosuke's voice said, as Yu was fighting against Shulk, Greninja, and Cloud there.

However, what happened next was changing into Yukiko's Castle.

"It can't be," Chie's voice muttered, as the fighters changed to Bayonetta, Ryu, and Dark Pit. "Yukiko!"

"I know," Yukiko's voice said. "And I can't believe that they'd use THAT."

The surprise came two-fold when both Chie and Yukiko's Shadows manifested on separate occasions.

"Talk about a blast from the past," Yosuke's voice said.

"Now this stage is getting un-bear-able," Teddie's voice said. "I mean, really, those Shadows?"

Next part was the Tropical Paradise Suspicious as Pikachu, Jigglypuff, and Kirby are up against Yu, who's summoning Izanagi.

"Kanji," Naoto's voice said, "is this..."

"Wha..." Kanji's voice sounded startled. "Look, that was settled a long time ago. Still, why is THIS place used!?!"

It got weirder as Kanji's Shadows had appeared.

"Okay, now I'm freaking out," Yosuke's voice said. "How did they get this part approved?"

"I've no clue," Teddie's voice muttered, "but really, I thought the wet floors were hazardous enough."

"What was that?" Kanji's voice yelled, startling Teddie.

Then the place turned into Maru Q, although it looked a little toned down as Fox, Falco, and Lucario had faced Yu.

"Oh, please don't tell me my Shadow's going to make an appearance," Rise's voice muttered.

"No, the place looks worn," Yosuke's voice said. "And I'd doubt we'd be that lucky."

The surprise came when Teddie's Shadow made an appearance, nearly striking the area.

"Even looking at it from this angle," Teddie's voice said, "he's still grizzly."

"I'm still amazed that something like this spawned from you," Yukiko's voice added.

The next part looked like a secret laboratory, with Captain Falcon, Ness, and Luigi in the area.

"This place," Naoto's voice said. "Of course it had to be this place."

"Well, it's not exactly as bad as the last few places," Rise's voice replied.

"I'm just wondering why I haven't seen my OWN Shadow," Yosuke's voice said.

Speaking of Shadows, Naoto's own had appeared, zapping the areas.

"Still has that effect," Rise's voice replied. "Although I'm more amazed that it doesn't age the fighters."

"Must be an effect of the brawl," Naoto's voice mused.

Finally, Magiatsu Inaba had appeared with Mewtwo, Palutena, and Mr. Game And Watch fighting Narukami.

"Please tell me we're not going to be running into Adachi," Yu's voice muttered.

"Or that giant eyeball," Yosuke's voice added.

That's when they heard a voice.

"I'LL DESTROY ANYTHING THAT BORES ME!" it yelled, hopping in the area. "STARTING WITH YOU!"

"OH COME ON!" Yosuke's voice yelled.

"Giant frogs," Chie's voice said. "You know that does explain a lot."

"Seriously," Yosuke's voice added, "of all the Shadows to use, why mine?"

"I'm just lucky they didn't use mine," Rise's voice retorted.

After that, Narukami can be seen grabbing the Final Smash Ball.

"IZANAGI-NO-OKAMI!" he yelled, breaking the card.

Indeed, Izanagi had changed into Izanagi-no-Okami and unleashed the Myriad Truths onto the fighters below before the scene changed to the game itself...and shut off.

...

Yu could only look at the screen in bewilderment. That's when he heard the phone ring.

"Hello..." he started.

"Dude, did you see that!?!" he heard Yosuke's voice. "I'm not sure what that means, but I'm pretty sure the last time that happened, we had to fight each other."

"Calm down," Yu said. "I know. I heard that one from the channel itself."

"But really, what the heck was that? You in Smash Bros? As much as I would like to see that, if the Midnight Channel was going to pull that off, I'm pretty sure you'd be in there already."

Yu gave out a nod. "I'm just wondering why it decided to make something like that."

"Who knows, but it's a good time to investigate. We'll meet up with the others at Junes and discuss this. See ya."

With that, the phone hung up and Yu went to sleep.

[Persona 4], [Yo-Kai Watch]
Personya!

Author: Black Omochao

Yu Narukami walked calmly down the Samegawa flood plains of Inaba while contemplating what course of action he should take this loop.

Jibanyan yawned as the silver haired teen walked passed him…only to turn around and stare at the strange two tailed cat laying on the grass. Jibanyan gave another yawn and opened one of his eyes-and closed it again after a quick glance at the person whom was looking at him…

"Wait, you can see me!?" Jibanyan suddenly sprung up in realization.

"Yes, I suppose that's not common for you?"

"No," Jibanyan shook his head, he glanced around the area he was in. "…Where am I anyway?"

"Inaba-are you a demon?"

"Demon? No, my name's Jibanyan-I'm a yo-kai!" Jibanyan exclaimed while jumping up briefly. "So, this might be a weird question but, are you a looper?"

…

"Team, this is Jibanyan," Yu introduced the cat yo-kai to the awake investigation team as they all sat at the Junes food court.

"Hi!" Jibanyan waved.

"…a cat?" Yosuke questioned blankly.

"He's a looper," Yu stated calmly before he proceeded to introduce Jibanyan to each of the members of his team.

"This is so weird, I've nyever woken up in a different city before," Jibanyan said as he looked around.

"So I take it this is your first fused loop?" Naoto questioned as she eyed Jibanyan's two tails.

"I guess so," Jibanyan shrugged before pulling a chocobo bar out of his sub-space pocket to eat.

"Why is a cat eating a chocolate bar? Is that even ok?" Yosuke asked as he watched the scene, Yukiko let out a small chuckle.

"A cat eating chocolate," she giggled. Yosuke looked at her in confusion.

"In what way is that funny?"

…

“Say Jibanyan, wanna help me ‘score’ with some of the ladies,” Teddie asked the yo-kai as they hung out in Yosuke’s house. “I heard the ladies love cute cats-not as much as bears of course-but I bet we could double our ‘scoring’ power if we worked together.”

“Hmm…sounds like a plan, why nyot?” Jibanyan smirked as he gripped Teddie’s paw. “We’ll ‘score’ all the hot girls!”

“Would you two stop saying ‘score!’ And why does the cat have to stay at my house!?” Yosuke shouted from down the hall.

…

“What did you learn?” Yu questioned as he sat by Jibanyan and Teddie, both nursing bruises on their heads.

“Chie. Kicks. Hard!” Jibanyan groaned while rubbing his head.

“I did tell you that,” Teddie sighed while patting the cat’s shoulder.

…

“…Hey, Jibanyan?” Kanji looked at the small cat yo-kai whom was eating a chocolate bar.

“Yeah, what is it?”

“Can I…pet you?”

“What? Oh, ok-fine.” Jibanyan sighed before Kanji began to stroke his head a bit.

“So soft…”

“Ok! Getting weird!”

…

“I am you, what do you have to say to that you lazy, good for nothing, lame cat!?” The shadow Jibanyan growled as he glared his counterpart down, Jibanyan had insisted on going into the TV world with them to help with the Izanami, though they had all expected this.

“Lame!? Let me tell you something you impawster-I remember what happened clearly and Amy never called me lame!” Jibanyan growled back at the shadow-The investigation team stood away from the scene-knowing this was for the yo-kai to face on his own.

“You’re useless to Nate though-When have you truly ever been able to help him with a problem!? You’re nothing but a lazy, worse than dead, cat!” Jibanyan stared at the shadow for a few seconds before shrugging.

“Yeah, maybe,” Both the investigation team and the shadow were surprised by the nonchalant way he responded to his personal demons. “I guess I am pretty lazy sometimes…Nyate usually calls me when I’m in the middle of something anyway.” Jibanyan stared at the

shadow dead in the eyes. “But…That’s who I am! We all have flaws, and we can work to better ourselves-especially with the loops, so how about you stop taunting me and help meowt?”

Jibanyan’s shadow stared wide eyed, before it glowed and changed form-in the place of the shadow came a tiger-sized, dark red, upright standing cat-Fire blazed on its back and trailed down its spine until it hit the tips of its twin tails.

“Cool, so this is one of those personya things?” Jibanyan questioned the investigation team after the persona disappeared into a card.

“Wow! I guess you were already comfortable with yourself!” Teddie praised. Jibanyan paused for a moment and thought back to something that happened to him in baseline.

“Huh…I guess I already faced my demons…”

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

The few members of the Investigation Team were deep within Yukiko's Castle, searching for the namesake of the dungeon. The only difference between this time and most of the other times was that a faint smell was detected throughout the castle.

"Man, this smell's making me hungry."

"When aren't you hungry, Chie?"

"Shut up, Yosuke!"

Yu (Unawake) watched as the two teenagers argued. "Do you two often fight like this?" He was worried if they would be able to work together.

Yosuke put his friend's concerns to rest. "Don't worry, Yu. We might fight with each other, but we're still pretty close friends."

"Chie agreed. "Yeah, we won't let anything we do get in the way of finding Yukiko!"

"Alright, I just wanted to make sure. She should be up on the next floor, so let's go."

Reaching the room where Yukiko was kept in, they found the reason why the castle smelled like food. She and her Shadow we're eating take-out.

"Yukiko, where did you get the food?"

"Oh! We ordered from Aika's."

While Yu tried to figure out how they could deliver food to this place, Chie tried to bum some food from the Shadow (with little success).

[SMT IV]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

It all started with a fusion accident.

Flynn and Isabeau stared at the ... thing ... that had been born from a fusion meant to summon Cerberus.

"Puppymonkeybaby."

"So, you've been Looping longer than I have. Any idea what this is?"

"None, I'm afraid. Even Mido doesn't know what it is."

Flynn took a look around the desolated streets of Ueno. "Well whatever it is, it does a good job at keeping demons away. And people."

"Puppymonkeybaby."

"Yes, and I believe it would work better in an enclosed space."

"Oh? So you have an idea about what to do with it? What is it?"

…

Tayama, boss of the Ashura-Kai, had seen some shit in his life. Demons attacking, angels descending, the Cocoons taking the children away, the Firmament appearing, just to name a few.

But this? He had never seen anything like it! Everything they tried to throw at it, even the National Defense Divinities, failed to stop it.

"Will someone hurry up and get rid of this thing!?!"

"Puppymonkeybaby."

…

Author: Gamerex27

The Samurai stared at the pile of ash on the ground that had once been the puppymonkeybaby.

Merkabah snorted and conjured another bolt of holy fire. "*You placed your trust in a haphazard abomination to stop the Chariot of the Lord? I see: heretics such as you are not just Unclean: you are Foolish as well."*

"Maybe we shouldn't have trusted a demon whose only skill was *Danse Macarbe* to kill the damned *archangels!*" Flynn growled, grunting in pain as a bolt of sacred plasma whizzed by his shoulder.

"You *saw* the stats on that demon! They reached the *hundreds!*" Isabeau countered, shooting a gale of Category 5 hurricane-speed winds at the Chariot of God, and getting some minor cuts and bruises for her trouble. "Was it *my* fault that he got a dozen critical hits in a row?! Ever since the Wedding Battle, they've been stronger and-"

Isabeau was cut short by a bolt of star-hot fire striking her square between the eyes, leaving a frusturated Administrator to quell the country-wide fire that somehow carried into the next Loop.

[Persona 4]
Poor Yosuke
Author: Alternis_Alcor

Yu was waiting by his scooter, waiting for Yosuke and Kanji in Okina City. Considering the date, he believed that Yosuke wanted to give his 'up close and personal' plan another go. Kanji had arrived only minutes ago, already tired of waiting.

"So is Yosuke-senpai really going to do this again? He does remember the last time we tried this, right?"

Yu shuddered as the memory replayed itself. He needed to keep his friend from trying such a plan the next time they were in such a crossover.

"Hey, guys! Sorry to keep you waiting!"

Yosuke had finally arrived, and what he rode in surprised the two Loopers.

"Yosuke, is that a light-cycle?"

"Hell yeah! It was a pain in the ass getting it but it was so worth it. This thing is gonna bring all the girls over here for sure!"

While Yu was rather impressed Yosuke was working hard for the plan to work, Kanji was a bit skeptical.

"Uh-huh. Well have fun, Senpai. Ma needed me to grab some things anyway so I'll get out of your hair. See ya guys."

"Huh? Oh, right. See ya, dude."

After watching him leave, Yosuke turned back to Yu. "And now, we wait."

…

When Kanji came back he was surprised to see the light-cycle had already been crushed beyond all hope of repair. Yosuke was on his knees in despair and hopelessness as Yu tried to comfort him.

Turning to Yu he asked,"So, what happened here?"

"Hanako happened."

"Oh damn. Hey, Yosuke, you alright there?"

The despondent boy barely registered that he was being spoken to.

"I'm cursed. That's the only possible explanation. I've done something absolutely terrible, something so heinous in a past life that I'm still being punished. That has to be the reason why this keeps happening."

"You thought well, Yosuke. Now, we shall avenge you."

"Will you two stop trying to avenge me every time this happens!?!"

[Persona 4], [Persona Q]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

"Hey, Nanako! I'm about to make some dinner, do you want anything special?"

The Loop had been pretty simple so far, almost following the same path the baseline did, and Yu felt that he needed to do something, so he decided to cook something.

"Can we have omelets again tonight?"

He smiled, it seemed like omletes with rice were her favorite dish this time around. Their guest certainly agreed with Nanako.

"Oh! And can we rice and tofu and chawanmushi and crabcakes and-"

"Yes, Rei, I'll make all that too." The young girl had shown up that day with Zen by her side, and Yu had invited them both into the house.

As both girls cheered Zen stood up from the small table they were all seated at. "Will you need any assistance?"

"Don't worry, Zen. I can handle cooking all that, you just sit there with the girls."

Reaching the fridge, Yu opened it to take out some ingredients-

"Hisssssssssssss!"

-only to shut it quickly. Zen was already by his side.

"Is something wrong?"

Yu didn't say anything, but steeled himself to open the fridge again.

"Hissssssssssss!"

"Nope."

Shutting the fridge shut again, Yu turned around to address the girls. "Hey, change of plans! Zen here is going to take you over to Junes so you can eat there, alright?"

Zen leaned in close to whisper. "Are you sure? Whatever is in there cannot be that bad, right?"

"I don't know, but I don't want Nanako or Rei to see whatever it is in there. Here's my wallet, let them buy whatever they want while I take care of whatever this thing is."

Nanako had rushed over in excitement, asking "Can we really?"

"Of course! Hurry along now, you don't want to get there late!"

"Okay, Big Bro! Come on, Rei! We get to go to Junes!"

While the two girls ran out the door, Zen hung back for a second. "I'll pray for your success, Narukami."

After they had all left Yu was about to call Yosuke and Kanji to help him get rid of whatever those old leftovers had evolved into.

"Hmm. I might need to also call Mitsuru and her friends as well."

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: TrueZero2

“I think this Loop’s King Moron’s actually a little more tolerable, right Partner?” Yosuke said, looking the also-Awake Yu, then at Chie. The female Looper looked at Yu before returning to Yosuke and shrugging. “What’re you doing?”

“We’re in a Variant Yosuke.” Yu replied, “Nothing major, but I *do* have some plans to work on.”

“Plans?” Chie replied, joining the conversation. “What plans?”

“The school clubs are all jumbled around this time.” Yu replied, furiously working out dates. “None of them are in the usual spots so I’ve got to work out my Social Link Schedule for the year.”

“You schedule that stuff?” Chie replied, surprised. “Doesn’t it just carry over?”

“Considering we’re the only three members of the group that’re Awake this time around?” Yosuke replied, “I can see the first part happening. Second though? Not so much. Strange that after all this time I’ve never seen you do this though Yu.”

“Never been this bad before.” Yu replied, “Plus we’ve got Marie this Loop, so I’ve got to pencil her in as well.”

“What? No Adachi?” Chie asked, “I’m fine with leaving that douchebag off the list.”

“Not enough evidence to catch him yet.” Yosuke replied, “We’re stuck with him this time.”

Chie groaned.

“Crap, I forgot Adachi.” Yu said, tearing the page out of his notebook and starting over. “Ugh, it’s a headache, but it’s useful later on. Mind if I catch you later? I’m gonna head home and work this out.”

“Sure dude, we’ll see you tomorrow.” Yosuke replied. Yu got up, bid his two friends farewell and left the classroom.

“You know Chie, sometimes I’m kind of glad that I’m not a Wild Card.” Yosuke smiled.

“I do like the extra Personas though.” Chie replied. “They're always useful.”

“True enough.” Yosuke replied. “Come on, I’ve got some allowance saved up from my last Loop. Let’s go get you another copy of Trial of the Dragon.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Chie said, the two of them grabbing their bags and heading for Junes.

Persona 5 Activation and The Edit (segment.1)

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: Alternis_Alcor

The Investigation Team were traveling through the Void Quest dungeon, where Yu had hoped to test out a new Persona he had fused.

"Dude, what the hell is up with that book?"

Yu was holding a strange book. It was rather old and tattered, and seemed to be bound in strange leather. And for some reason it gave everyone bad vibes.

"It's my new Persona."

Chie leaned closer to inspect it- wait, did it just growl at her? "I don't know, it doesn't seem like much. What's it called?"

"Necronomicon."

"WHAT!?!?"

Chie pulled away from the book before it could do anything. "What the hell are you doing with something like that?!"

"I saw it in the list of new Personae and got curious."

For a minute nobody said anything, until Kanji raised his hand. "So... what can it do?"

At that moment a Supreme Hand wandered around the corner and before it could try to escape, Yu pointed the book toward it and opened it. A slew of tentacles and other incomprehensible things blasted out of Necronomicon and grabbed the Supreme Hand, before dragging it into the book as it tried to claw its way to freedom.

Everyone was silent as they tried to comprehend what the hell they had just seen.

"And I put my face near that?"

[SMT IV]
The Edit – Skumh Brane (title assigned by compiler) part 1
Author: Gamerex27

The rising sun over Mikado was accompanied by the sound of a handful of roosters crowing, signaling the Casualries to begin their work for the day.

Today, however, their cries were accompanied by an ear-piercing shriek somewhere from the center of the capital.

Isabeau fell out of bed as she Awoke, phantom agony still wracking her body. Panting, she disentangled herself from her bedsheets and stared at herself.

She was *not* on fire anymore, which was definitely good. It dimly occured to her that she had probably died due to being burned alive, and had thus abruptly ended the Loop, but she was too busy attempting to ease her father's nerves as he rushed to her room and convince him that she was *perfectly* hale and able to go to the Gauntlet Rite in spite of falling painfully out of bed.

Isabeau should have probably also been disturbed that her father's face and voice were unrecognizable clouds of static and lacking in any sort of physical matter, but she had long ago learned that the World had lost its record of her family. Faces, voices, all but the faintest memories...all of those had vanished from whatever catastrophe had broken the World.

She still had some time before the Rite began. Swallowing, she removed her Gauntlet from her Pocket and rang Flynn's number.

No response. Which meant that she was alone for the Loop.

Again.

Which also meant that she would have to stop Lilith, kill Tayama, destroy Merkabah, and *carefully* edge Flynn down from the extremes of Law and Chaos so he wouldn;t try and destroy the world.

Alone.

Again.

On autopilot, she bathed and then dressed herself. She looked into the washbasin, her haggard, tired face reflected in the water.

Which Loop was this? It had been somewhere around $@^& last time she had counted...had she switched to scientific notation yet? Did the prior Loop where she'd been burned to death as a witch for using magic before actually getting the Gauntlet count, since it was cut short? And was it the dozenth time that exact chain of events occured, or the *baker's* dozen? And...and...

Her heart sank to the bottom of her body. It had finally happened. She had lost count.

How long, then, had she been doing this? How many times had she had the same conversations, fought the same battles, seen the same demons, monsters, crippled children, and corrputed, warped parodies of her comrades?

Masakado hadn't told her how close they were. Nor had other Loopers, the two or three times they had been to her Branch. The question was always awkwardly ignored, brushed aside as the human mind balked at the idea of eternity. At the concept of infinity.

She saw Flynn out of the corner of her eye. No. Not Flynn. Flynn had a color pallet.
The *same* color pallet, since *nothing ever changed ever*.

Isabeau conjured a gale force in her hand strong enough to blast the entire building to shreds. Then, she allowed it to vanish.

Why bother? Why bother fighting it when it would just rese-

No. No, don't think that. You'll let it win. You just don't want to give it the satisfaction, that's all. That's the real reason.

That's what she had been telling herself for as long as she could remember.

But saying something and believing it are two entirely different things.

As she trudged out of her room to make her way to Aquila Plaza, she missed the White's eyes close in resignation. And triumph.

[SMT IV], [Final Fantasy X]
(no title)
Author: LostHereAndThere

“I refuse.”

Charon grimaced. One of the irritating ones.

“Let me make this perfectly clear: should you refuse my offer, you will linger here for as long as it takes for your number to come up. And believe me, mountains will crumble into dust far, far faster than that.”

“You ask too high a price, ferryman. And I’m expected in the land of the living. So step aside or fall to my blade!”

Charon sighed as the drunk idiot drew the abomination he dared to call a sword. His own blindness did not disturb him in the slightest, nor did his lack of a weapon. He relaxed, following the blade’s song as it cut through the air, rising as the swordsman prepared to put his entire weight in a killing strike at Charon’s brainpan. As the sword fell in a perfect arc at his head, Charon sighed and smiled benevolently.

The blade crashed against the ferryman’s forehead, and *shattered.*

The idiot barely managed to catch himself before landing, and stumbled into a crude defensive stance, cursing as he opened his Pocket and drew another of those horrors.

“You understand this means my fee will rise considerably.”

Unfazed, Auron charged. Rolling his unseeing eyes, Charon made no move to dodge. Another blade was shattered. After that, the idiot tried hammers. Then guns. Then sorcery. Technology. Blends betwixt both. Charon just smiled indulgently as he kept to his paperwork.

Whatever the swordsman did, he failed to damage the already grimy robes of the eternally-smiling ferryman or even shuffle the papers he was diligently filling.

“You are only going to get tired.”

As the escapee-wannabe kept pounding at Charon with everything he had, the ferryman himself sighed in exasperation as he kept to his paperwork, barely noting the passage of time even as the minutes passed into hours, which bled into days, after which it all just melted Auron’s brain into a sort of porridge. Best for the idiot to get it all out of his system. Next time it would go down easier. It was fools like this that made him regret being such a good civil servant. One did one’s best to keep the books in order and then something like this came along. *One of these days upper management really has to send someone to fix things down here. How many afterlives just as horribly mismanaged as this Spira,* he wondered. At least this idiot didn’t seem as… enthusiastic as those monkey people. Last time he ever wanted to deal with aliens.

Oh well, looks like he finally got the hint.

Smirking, Charon stopped the exhausted Auron’s lightsaber mid-swing, and casually extinguished the energy blade just like he would put a candle off. The broken weapon clattered next to the growing pile of shattered artifacts and spent cartridges. Gently, he pushed the swordsman, who fell with a minimum of fuss to the ground.

“I trust this lesson has been productive. I really don’t know what kind of mess you’re used to, but I assure you I shall not be nearly as lenient. My rules are simple. Pay and leave, or stay until your number comes. No nonsense like challenges, riddles, or unfinished business allowed here. Now, as for the payment…” The ferryman plucked a piece of paper from his robes, scribbled something, and presented it to the wheezing Auron.

Gingerly, the downed swordsman managed to pick the paper. “The hell is this? This ain’t a number!”

“No, it’s an equation. Far faster than writing the whole number.”

Groaning, Auron slid a Bottomless Box at Charon’s feet, hissing as the ferryman started fiddling with it. Truth be told, he had no idea of how much the ferryman was going to charge him. Bah. There was enough money and loot in that box to buy all of Spira more than fifty times over. As he recovered on the ground, Charon tossed him a few coins.

“What is this?”

“Your change.”

Spluttering, tugging at his scalp, Auron scrambled to catch the money. Not even enough for a decent meal, let alone repair his swords, or get a room for the night… Millennia upon millennia of painfully building savings, all gone in a single blow. And there was not a single blessed thing he could do about it.

So this is what the damn duck felt like all the time

“Do be careful though. My fees go up every time I do this, and you don’t strike me as the tab type.” Charon snorted as he deposited the box in his desk. “Now, before you complain, let me ask you: is money really worth that much to you? More than, say, *your life itself?* Money exists to be spent. What use is it to you gathering dust in the face of death?”

Balling his fists, hissing, Auron choked, even as he felt the familiar tug of the land of the living calling him: “What could you possibly need that much money for?”

Just then, the happy chime of a bicycle rang across the uneven banks of the Styx. A young girl waved at Charon, who gleefully received a package of food. The girl just stood there impassively as Charon loaded sack after sack of coins and gems into her basket. At the end, she oversaw the mound of valuables, nodded in satisfaction, and left the ferryman to his meal.

“…wat.”

Charon arced an eyebrow as he sat to dig in as Auron faded into life.

“Do you have *any* idea of how much delivery *costs* here?”

*Aika’s. **Any**where. **Any**time.*

[Persona 4], [Digital Devil Saga]
Dojima’s Awakening – part 3
Author: LostHereAndThere

The dream again.

Ryotaro shivered. Anticipation. Fear. Confusion. Every time he came here, to this strange, deceptively peaceful world, he understood the place a bit better. He still had no idea of what it all meant, but by now he was certain there was a method behind the madness.

He was sitting on a square of light blue fabric, itself set on rocky ground. Not too far away, he could hear the happy peals of laughter of a child. Water flowed nearby. The bright disk shone fiercely in the skies above, to the intense fascination of the demon he could still feel within himself. Gone was his armor, and instead he wore light, airy clothes obviously designed for comfort rather than protection. And next to him, the woman with the void-colored eyes grinned with writhing lips.

His mouth dried. A word tugged at the edge of his mind. The demon squirmed, feeling the same pressure itself. Shivering, he huddled over and embraced the woman, who reciprocated. Her deformed, twisting features curled into a parody of a content smile as she sank into his chest.

He gave in. He said the word. The *name.*

All that came out of his mouth was white noise. And then the world exploded in a shriek of memories and nothing was anymore.

…

Ryotaro jerked awake with a shudder, heart hammering in his chest. He barely managed to pay enough mind to start breathing through his mouth in a desperate effort to slow down the heavy panting. Almost stumbling, he left his cot and reached for the en-suite bathroom. Somehow he managed to peel off the light armor and throw himself into the ice-cold shower.

“Fuck.” Third night in a row. Ever since that blasted kid gave him the word, the dreams had gotten more vivid and frequent. However, no matter what, the woman remained right there, so painfully close, enough to touch her skin and smell her hair. And then he reached out, and the dream punished him with – like… like that. It was like pushing his eye to a peephole into Nirvana and then poking it out with a knife. Next time, he was going to break the kid's legs and drag him to Vishuddha for full interrogation. Even now, part of him wished he’d overridden his curiosity and just bitten his head off. Maybe with the extra reinforcements he wouldn’t have had to deal with the Phantoms and whatever weapon their damn leader had gotten from the Temple. Ass-kissing bastards.

Well. He wasn’t going to go back to sleep anyway. Better see if there was stuff to be done. Which there always was.

He somehow managed to trudge to his office and pull out the latest Phantom activity reports. Their new toy, some sort of fog or mist, unknown method of dispersion, maddened the Atma of those unlucky enough to be caught in it. Turned them into maniacs. Cannibals. No middle stage. No prolapsed breakdown. Sane soldier a moment, frothing demon the next. It didn't matter how well the soldier got along with the demon or how much they ate. The few survivors weren't much help compiling a new strategy for dealing with the new weapon. Unconfirmed sightings of the Phantom leader near dispersal points might or might not have any merit. Casualties were mounting, supply runs from the Temple menaced. The Hunters were in trouble.

A low knock snapped him out of his concentration. "Enter."

"Not a good day, eh, Boss?" Ryotaro grunted. Daidara was a top-notch armorer, and one of the reasons the Hunters were still in shape to keep fighting against the steady Phantom onslaught. If anyone could make sense of the machine he'd taken from the Temple and its possible uses, it was him. "Well, here I come bearing gifts."

"I take it the machine was useful then?"

The armorer's grin turned ferocious. "Ho, yes. Servos were nothing new, but the brain's modular. Managed to disassemble it and patch our comms grid into the Temple's. Anything the Ghosties tell those uppity assholes, we'll be listening." Ryotaro smirked. One less advantage for the Phantoms. "And another thing. I could identify most of the tech, except one or two pieces. I tested 'em - one of those is a transmitter, beaming a signal that breaks Atma!" The Hunter leader sharply inhaled. "I know, I know. Shoulda have reported it straight in. But

I had to make sure. Sent it to the hospital wing for test with the crazies and wounded to ascertain effectiveness."

“And?”

The Hunters’ armorer bowed and presented a thick bangle to his Leader. “Well, it works, but it has its limits – doesn’t work beyond six, seven meters. Needs one or one and a half seconds to work – less than that and it gets dicey. I could refine it with more materials… but I understand it’s unfeasible at the moment.”

Ryotaro frowned as he inspected Daidara’s handiwork. “Tell me about it.”

A brief overview of the device later, Ryotaro sighed. "Fuck."

"Sir?" The longest five seconds of silence in Daidara's life followed. "We're that screwed?"

Ryotaro seethed in his seat. "Close. We’re not dead yet, but the Phantoms’ toy is making us bleed badly and we can’t afford to keep throwing bodies at ‘em.” A strange sort of hunger that had nothing to do with the demon filled him. A need for something to take off the edge of the grueling day to come. Something that burned. Sighing, he forced it down and opened a comms channel.

“Adachi. Uehara. Morooka. Ten minutes. My office.”

Daidara frowned. “What are you planning, sir?”

The Hunter leader leaned back in his seat. “We’re not going to sit on the grinder until they’ve made mincemeat of us. Start stripping down the base and prepare for evac.”

The armorer raised an eyebrow. “Where to?”

“Svadhisthana. And get me a channel with the Embryon.”

…

“Oi, bro!”

Gale set down the file he was examining. “Yes, Cielo?”

“Message from de Hunters. Dey want to meet in Svadhisthana.”

“Same conditions as usual?”

“Ja. Only a token force an’ Narukami ta meet their Leader.”

Gale nodded in acknowledgement. He swiftly sent messages to Sera and Narukami to prepare. As he checked over the radio, he disapprovingly noted the Phantoms had begun scanning the airwaves for the command frequency of the Embryon. Annoyed, he switched the frequency they were searching for to a secure connection to the Temple.

Clever as the Phantoms might be, he doubted they would be smart or cynical enough to look for enemy command chatter in their ally's computers.

[Persona 3]
Chidori's Awakening – part 1 and 2
Author: Garebel

[8/31/09, Evening]

(Minato POV)

I signed, It was the same old stuff every Loop. Maybe, something interesting will happen, now.

"Minato!!" Wait, Junpei?

"What now, Stupei!!" Ahhh Yukari, back to the insulting nicknames.

"I meet Chidori this Loop, today, and I saw her drawing." Drawing, that's normal…"

"Then what's the problem?" Straight to the point as normal.

"She was drawing what happened on November 22, THIS YEAR during the DARK HOUR!!" Wait what!?

"What the F***!?" I yelled out. "She couldn't know that! Unless…" I trailed off…

"Did she just Awakened!?" Yukari questioned Junpei, in my place.

"I didn't get the chance, when I saw the drawing was we were leaving. I'll question her during the Full Moon OP." Junpei said to which I nodded in Approval. The next op was the Hermit, meaning Junpei will be kidnapped by Chidori.

"Just make sure you act like baseline." I told Junpei, who nodded.

"Ok, I'll convince Mitsuru to allow Junpei's plan. With any luck, She'll, at least, not worry about him missing during the op." Yukari said, volunteering to talk to Mitsuru.

"Maybe tell her I found someone with the potential, and meet up with them on that day, so, I'll be unavailable on that day?" Junpei suggested.

"Ok, when did Stupei gain a brain?" Yukari asked me.

"Stop calling me that, Yuka-tan!!" Junpei yelled, but it was with amusement, not anger. I smiled. At least when the Loops end, the Fall never happen, and I won't become the seal… Suddenly I got something.

"Actually, I think I have a better plan…". I trailed off, Yukari and Junpei tilling their heads.

…

[11/22/09, DAR|< |-|0|_||']

[Chidori POV]

I gasped as Takaya shot my love dead, again. I can't believe it… I tried to stop Junpei from being shot, but I failed… I ran quickly to his side to use Medea's Spring of Life to trade my life for his, only to blink at the 'body' I caught.

It was some sort of wooden dummy with the face being a string of insults to Strega, but not mentioning me once. I looked over the dummy which was wearing the same clothes as Junpei and saw the dummy took the bullet instead of Junpei.

"What the…!?" I heard that bastard Takaya yell out. "Jin!"

"First we have to clean up the mess, then we look for the lost sheep." I heard Jin spoke before I heard glass shattering. He must have summoned Moros…

I yelled in rage as I called out Medea, without Junpei to worry about, my anger manafested, and aim at my former friends. I know I can't do much on Jin, but in my rage, I didn't care. I'll make them pay.

[Minato POV]

Good, the plan worked! Now We needed to deal with Strega, now. I saw Chidori Summon Medea, but this time something was off…

I then realized Medea was covered in cracks where blue light escaped from. There was no way something like that was possible…

"Wait!" I told my friends.

"But if we do that, those Assholes will get away." I heard Shinjiro complained. It's a good thing he and Ken Awoke. We didn't even needed to worry about October 4th.

"Something's wrong…Fuuka, try to scan Medea!" I gave out my order to our support.

"I can't! Something is blocking me!" Fuuka replied back to me. I frowned. What's happening…?

Unfortunately, Takaya took the chance and shot her, right there, but instead of disappearing, Medea just floated to Chidori's side, making no signs of ending Chidori's life.

'What's happening?' Minato thought before a blue light blinded those looking at the scene from seeing what is happening.

[Chidori POV]

I blinked as I looked around my surroundings. This is not Tartarus. It looked like the entrance to an abandoned temple. I found myself drawn to the temple for some reason…

"What's going on…?" I asked myself as I walked inside. There was only a statue inside, but one that I felt like I know about. I was in the center in the temple when I saw a mutalated copy of myself.

"Medea…" I muttered to myself. Why was she here…? That's when I noticed something.

"Medea, why are you bleeding now!? The Spring of Life…" I shout before Medea interrupted.

"**Is being used in the same manner as you did to your love…"** my eyes widened. Medea was taking my place.

"But without you, I can't do anything during the Dark Hour…" I told Medea, who smiled.

"**But you still can, I will be gone soon, but, I am artificial. In this temple… The…true… you……is……he…re..."** I heard Medea trailed before faded away. I was confused, before I turned to the statue, realizing the only solution.

"Are you…Me?" I asked the statue which actually nodded. A bright light shone through the area, as I accept my power…

[General POV]

The blue light soon died down, revealing Chidori alive, but Medea missing.

"To think, you losing your power would be inconceivable…" Takaya started to taunt Chidori, whose response was to aim her Evoker at her head.

"Wha…what are you doing!?" Jin asked, as Chidori fired her Evoker, with blue shards flying around, indicating she has a Persona…

"Thou art I…" a feminine voice echoed. **"and I am Thou. I have truly awakened from your soul…I am Hecate, the one who has the will to protect from afar…"** the new Persona spoke. Hecate had armor cover all but the arms and head, the latter of which is covered by a helmet shaped like a frog head. In one hand, she holds a sniper rifle, in the shape of a key, in the other hand was a Trident with each of the three points is emanating either Ice, Electricity, or Wind while at the other end, flames were being spewed out, ready to go far.

"What!?" Takaya said, backing up, he never even heard of this.

"Medea is dead, Takaya, But I have found my TRUE SELF!!" Chidori yelled, Hecate aiming the key-shaped rifle at Takaya.

"NO!!" Jin yelled, Moros quickly running in front of them, but was soon sporting a hole in its body before disappearing. "What…that…That Attack was Almighty-Based!!" Jin yelled in shock. Takaya growled.

"Get…Get Them!" Takaya yelled, summoning his Persona, Hypnos to attack Chidori. It barely moved from the entrance to Tartarus, when fireballs from the sky blasted Hypnos into disappearance, causing Takaya to be knocked out.

"A Hero always shows up in the nick of time!" A male voice yelled out. Chidori smiled at the voice.

"Mind explaining what's going…on…Junpei?" Chidori asked, only to blinked at the Persona that was carrying Junpei. It looked like Hermes, but the robe was red, and it had two small wings on its back. More Importantly, Chidori felt a piece of Medea inside it.

"It's a long story, Chidorita, but we need to deal with Strega first." Junpei explained.

"All right…but I still want the explanation or you're going to sleep on the couch!!" Chidori threatened.

"Yes, Ma'am!" Junpei gulped.

[Persona 5], [JoJo's Bizarre Adventure]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Joker dashed through the clocktower staircase to the castle. He pulled himself up onto one of the cogs and rode it up to the next floor. Preparations had already been made, the tower mapped out, and the treasure located. The calling card had been delivered. Then over the news, the target had announced haughtily to go ahead and try to steal it. But the situation had backfired drastically, somehow. It was like the entire tower had been remodeled and they had to start from the beginning. Further, there were no saferooms to rest and recover in. Thankfully, this entire affair was coming to a close as he pulled himself through a grate in the ceiling into the throne room.

The castle was massive, caste in gold with various trinkets and pictures lining the room portraying the man in victorious poses over all manner of beings. In the center of the room sat a heavily muscled man with blonde hair, yellow coat over a black skin fitting turtleneck. His teeth glistened in the light as he shouted, "You should be pleased to have made it so far."

He stood from his seat and started clapping, "Do you know who's heart you are attempting to steal from? What heroic goal do you seek to achieve? My death? Redemption? Perhaps you seek to break me? You are not the first, though certainly the method is unique. I have watched your exploits, and commend you for your accomplishments, pitiful and meaningless though they may be. To have made it this far even when your compatriots have been forced to retreat."

Joker bristled as the man continued to mock him. His smile disappeared as his murderous intent flooded the room, crushing Joker like a Hydraulic Press, "But you have committed a grave felony against me, the ruler of this world, and against a being that even time acknowledges as its king."

He tore something from the ceiling and held it right in front of the thief's face. He recognized it as a camera. "And everyone will know. Even now, I am transmitting everything to the outside world. They will watch as you fail, as I break you. Then they will know they belong to me. Everyone will know the name of DIO!"

He gripped the thief in his hands and held him aloft. But then DIO dropped the thief and lept backwards as a black sword cut between the two of them. DIO looked at the grate, where now stood a male on the cusp of adulthood, wearing a black school uniform jacket and a white button up shirt underneath. His hair was deceptively grey for his youthful age. DIO, however, chuckled to himself in recognition, "Finally, a real challenge has arrived."

Joker found himself no longer crushed under the killer intent, though his hands were certainly shaking. He said, "You're late, Yu."

"Sorry about that. The train from Inaba was running behind schedule. Still, picking a fight with DIO with as few loops as you've had, that's reckless."

Joker shrugged, "I couldn't stand by as he ruthlessly bought up all the businesses in Japan and forced thousands out of their jobs."

DIO shouted, "The World, Time Stop!"

The inner world and Joker stopped in their tracks, but Yu held up his Katana in a defensive stance between him and DIO. The vampire snorted at him, "Still can't believe you managed to worm your way into an unawake version of mine's heart."

"DIO-"

DIO rolled his eyes and allowed time to flow once again. The vampire fell back towards the throne and threw it at Joker, "Take it. This place and its trinkets hold no meaning for me."

Joker blinked as the throne shrunk to the size of a normal chair, "Wait, you're just gonna give up?"

DIO grinned, "I will cease my actions and retreat for the rest of the loop. But if you ever attempt to break into my heart again, I will not be so forgiving next time. One day, I will rule the multiverse, so ruling this one world is meaningless."

With that, DIO faded. Moments later, they were running for their lives as gold bricks rained on them with the onset of the palace's collapse.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

"Hey buddy, got any more peanuts?"

Ryuji Sakamoto, AKA Skull, sat in a fold out chair, watching as Shadow Kamoshida shake at

the cell gate locking him in. Akira Kurusu, AKA Joker, sat next to him, stuffing his face with popcorn. He set down the container before handing Skull another carton of peanuts. The blonde haired boy gave a toothy grin as he pulled them out and started throwing them at the cell. They should try this with all of their future targets! Morgana wandered up to them and moaned, "Guys, who knows what this will cause in the real world!"

Ryuji waved the cat off, "Relax, what's the worst that could happen?"

…

Next Day

Joker looked at the new notice on the board.

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY

PEANUTS AND PEANUT BASED PRODUCTS ARE NOW BANNED FROM SHUJIN ACADEMY, DUE TO FOOD BASED ALERGIES CERTAIN STUDENTS HAVE. ANYONE CAUGHT WITH PEANUTS ON THEIR PERSON WILL BE SUSPENDED FROM SCHOOL IMMEDIATELY.

Morgana sighed, "I was afraid something like this might happen."

Joker shrugged, "Could have been worse."

…

Kawakami looked at Kamoshida with a half-lidded expression as he put up another notice on the second floor and asked, "Why?"

Kamoshida blinked and looked at his own hands, "I'm...not entirely sure myself. Lately I'm filled with rage whenever I see peanuts for some reason."

"Maybe you should take a few days off."

Kamoshida gave a sigh. "I might just do that."

…

"Skull, what the hell do you think you're doing," Morgana shouted at Ryuji. The teen was putting another box on top of the small pyramid outside Kamoshida's house.

He said, "Relax, It's only a few boxes."

Suddenly, a dump truck pulled up next to Kamoshida's house, causing Ryuji to panic for a moment, before he saw Joker waving at Skull from the door. He backed up the door and pulled the lever, causing the truck to unload its entire contents of Peanut boxes onto his front door. Ryuji's smirk stretched across his face. "Nice!"

Morgana was about to have a meltdown, "What are you guys doing! You're gonna wake him."

Joker smirked, "That would be impressive since I cast Dormina on him. He probably won't wake until the sun rises tomorrow morning."

Morgana planted both paws on his head, "You can't cast that spell outside the Metaverse! And how did you even get something like this?!"

Ryuji grabbed Morgana and jumped into the passenger side of the dump truck as Joker shrugged. "I know some guys who taught me a few tricks."

The three drove off with Morgana declaring how little that actually explains.

...

Next Day

Morgana gave Joker a long suffering look as the teen held up his hands. "I had nothing to do with this."

"You're the one who got a dump truck."

Joker pointed to the sky and said, "A plane is a bit harder to obtain. I gotta go through airport security, clear takeoffs with the flight tower, never mind having the right to overfly the right area."

...

In the plane, Ann Takamaki grinned as she watched the peanuts fall on Kamoshida's house like rain. She said, "Thanks for all the help, Mitsuru-san."

Mitsuru Kirijo waved her off, "It's nothing for a member of the Kirijo group. Though I'm surprised you're not down there watching Kamoshida's meltdown."

Ann gave a cheshire grin, "I can just imagine Kamoshida's face. Besides, I'm sure we'll have a chance to pull this off again in another loop, and I'll be able to see it for myself then."

[Persona 5], [Dragonball Z]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Vegeta stood at the counter, grumbling to himself. Here he was, shift leader of Big Bang Burger in Tokyo and was pretty annoyed at the obvious joke Yggdrasil was making at his expense. Still, he had tried one of his own Big bang burgers, and it was pretty good. The doorbell rang as a customer strolled in. Vegeta crossed his arms and asked, "What'll it be?"

The boy looked like an average sparring session with Goku. But he had none of the idiot's strengths as he stuttered, "W-well, I'll have the...Earth Burger."

Vegeta jumped over the counter and shouted, "What?! Is my Big Bang Burger not good enough for you?!"

The boy's eyes widened considerably, "N-no! I just-"

"Come on, best buddy! Leave him alone."

Vegeta looked away very annoyed as General Manager Goku stepped out with an Earth burger larger than the teen, "Here. On the house."

The teen blinked in surprise, "Uh, I-I'm not s-sure I can eat all that."

"You're a growing boy. Gotta have your veggies or you won't grow strong like me...or Vegeta."

…

Joker's eyebrow twitched. The burger challenge at Big Bang Burger seemed especially daunting this loop. Forget proficiency, guts or intelligence, he wasn't sure he could eat a burger the size of an entire house. He'd probably die trying. Goku slapped him on the back and asked, "You got this, champ!"

Joker sweatdropped before sighing. "Bottom's up."

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

"Guys, keep Kamoshida busy, I'm gonna try something."

Akira looked at the cat curiously before opening fire with his handgun, leading the others to do the same. They circled away from Kamoshida while Morgana lept onto the Chandelier. Akira didn't think too much on this as it was baseline. What he wasn't expecting was Kamoshida to be crushed under a familiar van.

…

The group stood outside the Hospital where Kamoshida was sleeping off a sudden and killer headache, staring at Morgana who was licking himself clean. A few moments passed in silence when Morgana noticed everyone looking at him. He shouted, "What?! I didn't kill his shadow self! He'll recover! It's not like that time I was a bridge."

Akira blinked. "When did that happen?"

Morgana blinked and looked sheepish. "Uh, you had been replaced that loop by Minato from SEES."

Ryuji muttered, "Mementos must have been weird that loop."

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Ann gave Ryuji a withering glare. "No, Ryuji."

Ryuji gave a wide grin. "But it's awesome!"

Ann slammed her hand on the table and shouted, "We're not calling ourselves-!"

She paused when the room suddenly went quiet as everyone looked at her. She gave an embarrassed grin and sat back down. After the room returned to normal activity, she whispered, "We're not calling ourselves the Buttpunchers Thieves."

Akira looked thoughtful. "Actually, I think it's a great name."

Ann gave him an incredulous stare, "Are you serious?"

Morgana's voice rose out of Akira's bag, "I think it's inspired."

A cloud seemed to form over Ann's head as she moaned. Why was she the only one awake this loop?

[Persona 5]
Akira (Joker)'s Activation
Author: Solaris Requiem

Akira Kurusu couldn't tell if this was some kind of divine joke or that his mind was playing tricks on him. He had fallen asleep in his bed at his hometown, tired but relaxed after everything that had transpired throughout the last hectic months. Ryuji, had looked at him like he was a stranger. It was... unsettling to say the least and some small part of Akira's psyche couldn't help but mourn what had been. But he could do it later, when the current danger that the both of them faced had passed.

Was all of their effort for naught? Was their entire struggle against the world for nothing at all?

"A peasant like you isn't worth beating," Kamoshida's Shadow taunted, garbed in a gaudy robe with a crown perched atop of his head. With a kick he sent Ryuji rolling on the ground, coughing up blood and gasping for air. All the while, Akira grit his teeth as he was held at sword-point, dressed in his school uniform.

'Hmm, how interesting,' a voice whispered in his head, echoing with dark power. *'Thine memory is... strange. Thou hast seen the sight before you previously...'* It was a voice that Akira had known immediately. It was the voice that he could not forget no matter how hard he tried; the voice of his inner self.

'Hmm? Thou hesitates... Answer me this, child of man... What shalt thou do? Thou knows that he shall die if thou does not intervene. Will thou remain silent? Or will thou find the will and

power to defy the entire world once more?' the voice whispered.

As the Shadows advanced Akira felt his blood begin to boil. Wrath, Rage, and Defiance sang its sweet siren song into his ears. The familiar burning of his Persona's power inside his heart was something that he would never forget. And so what if Ryuji and the others didn't remember him? So what if he had to go through his entire journey again? All that mattered was the things before him. And he would rather die than to leave his friends to suffer through this alone!

The voice in his head laughed in dark approval, *'Excellent! Thou hast found thine own answer and regained thine will! Very well, let our contract be renewed henceforth! Use our power to rend this pathetic scum from the earth!'* And with those words of approval Akira felt power course through his veins. The heat, flame, and dark power threatened to tear his entire body apart. But the young man welcomed the pain and the fire, letting it fuel his anger and hatred for the pretender before him. The familiar burning pain within himself brought a grin to his face, one that promised bloodshed.

"What are you smiling at, you lowly peasant?!" Kamoshida growled, raising his fist to strike Akira down. But before he could take a single step forward there was a surge of power and a torrent of blue flame.

The pillar of light and power swirled and danced, sending lights and reflection upon the ground and the cramped cell. The shadowy knights were sent flying, their armor slamming against the cell bars. Diabolical laughter echoed through the entire castle, sending shivers down the spine of all but Akira.

"What the hell's going on?!" the false king panicked. "What are you doing?!"

The blue fire that danced and circled Akira's form began to coalesce, to materialize into something unnatural.

"I am thou... Thou art I..." Onyx chains, forged from the fires of Hell itself, rattled and sang in their unearthly chorus. A face and a pair of demonic horns, painted from crimson fire, rose.

"From the sea of thy soul, I come." Blue flames gave way to red, black, and white. Akira's uniform burned and shifted, changing into a black armored overcoat.

"I am the Pillager of Twilight, the Phantom of Rebellion," Black wings, still burning with azure flame, spread. Their flickering dance of light and dark cast embers and shadows alike all around Akira.

"I am Arsene!" The figure, the Persona, declared to the world. Cursed light pulsed and sang, spearing all of the the tyrant's guards and reducing them to black muck and ichor. Ryuji scrambled backwards with an expression of both terror and awe.

"W-What is that?" he whispered as Kamoshida's shadow whimpered and ran for his life.

Akira grinned, his eyes alight with power. "This is Arsene, my other self. My Persona."

[Persona 5]
Morgana's Activation
Author: Solaris Requiem

The first thing that Morgana found when he woke up was a damp cold that clung to his fur. The not-cat shook his head and shivered a little. Rather than the warm bed in Akira's room he found himself in a dark and cold cell. He shook his head as he sprang upwards, looking around desperately into a very familiar looking cell.

"This is... Kamoshida's Palace?! B-But we stole the Treasure from here already!" Morgana asked himself as he scrambled to the bars. He gave the metal cell several shakes, but only the clanging of metal answered him. The running water of the underground river as well as the echoing footsteps of the guards answered him.

"Akira?!" Morgana cried out as he looked around desperately for his friend. "Akira!? Is anyone there?! Anyone?!" he was panicking, his mind racing with theories and ideas of what might have happened to him.

"Was it... all just a dream?" Morgana whispered as he closed his eyes. Morgana hated being alone; being abandoned in this cell. The memories in his head had told him of many things... his true purpose and of the battle and trials that he, Akira, and the rest of the Phantom Thieves had gone through. So, why was he locked up in this cell? Why was Kamoshida's palace still standing?

Morgana grit his teeth and slammed his hand against the cell bar, forcefully calming himself down. He needed to think. He needed to focus.

He needed to get out of this cell.

…

Akira found himself in Kamoshida's palace once again. He bit back a snarl of frustration. He had arrived home as he always did; having arrived home again with his comrades. He had changed things around for the better. But despite this, he still found himself under parole and in the exact same place that he was before.

Did he do something wrong? Did Yaldaboth do something that caused time to reset?

Akira was completely clueless and bound to this twisted time loop. And it frustrated him to no end. He was still a slave to this damned fate.

"Hey, you alright man?" Ryuji asked the Wild Card. Akira glared at him before he exhaled. "I'll be fine. We should get out of here."

Ryuji didn't look convinced at all but was smart enough to drop the subject. Akira looked around at Kamoshida's Shadow, shouting at the top of his lungs about death threats and how he would execute him once he got out. Personally the Persona User wished he could punch him in the face, but wasn't sure if it would damage Kamoshida if he did so. As he contemplated this, a familiar voice reached his ears.

"Akira?!" a voice called, making both of the boys freeze.

Ryuji blinked, "Dude, is it just me or did I hear someone call your name? I must be going crazy in here..." Akira's heart skipped a beat. Unlike Ryuji, he recognized that voice.

"Akira! Is anyone there?! Anyone?!" the voice called again. Akira's eyes widened as his head snapped in a certain direction. He suddenly ran towards the source of the voice, catching Ryuji off guard.

"Whoa! Wait up!" Ryuji shouted as he ran after the black-clad thief. Akira ignored him as the gears in his head began to turn. Did Morgana remember him? The possibility made his heart race and his blood pound.

As the two reached the underground river in the dungeon, Akira leaped across the broken bridge with practiced ease, causing Ryuji to lag behind. Akira didn't even bother to look back, choosing to run as fast as his legs could carry him.

"How did you- agh, forget it! Don't leave me behind!" Ryuji exclaimed as he too jumped over the broken bridge. He stumbled a bit but quickly ran after his new acquaintance. Their scrambling dash through the dungeon easily caught the attention of the enemy patrols in the area.

"INTRUDERS!" several of the Shadows shouted as Akira ignored stealth entirely. They brandished their swords and charged, but Akira grit his teeth. He didn't have time to deal with small fry.

"Get out of my way!!" Akira snarled. The white domino mask on his face burned, giving form to Arsene as the guards swung their swords at him. The Wild Card ducked under the first strike before leaping upwards onto the blade. His black knife flitted and danced, tearing apart shadowy flesh and matter while his Persona wreaked havoc with cursed light and forbidden magic. Ribbons of black energy circled and swarmed, cutting through armor and limb alike with a savage intensity.

Black ichor spurted out of the wounds and bodies of the shadows as they lost cohesion under the brutal assault of Akira and his Persona.

By the time Ryuji had caught up with him, the shadowy guards were already dissolving as Akira continued forwards. Ryuji gulped at this sight, resolving not to piss off Akira, and quickly followed.

...

Morgana heard the clashing of steel and the screams of the Shadows as he stood just behind the bars of his cell with bated breath. Ryuji and Akira were coming and he had to make preparations. He wracked his head trying to come up with a reason to join forces. He had his memory still intact so he needed a solid reason to join forces with the two of them again. But what would be enough to get them to accept him...

"Morgana?" a familiar voice asked as, causing him to blink and looked upwards. Akira, Joker, was looking right at him with widened eyes. Eyes that recognized him. Eyes that knew who he was.

"Akira?" he asked, daring to hope. The human nodded as Morgana sighed in relief. Akira quickly unlocked the cell, opening the door and letting the captive Morgana out.

"Alright, I finallly- Dude what the hell is that?! A cat?!" Ryuji exclaimed, pointing at Morgana. The cat narrowed his eyes.

"I'm not a cat, Ryuji!" he hissed before he froze. Ryuji narrowed his eyes.

"Wait a second, how did you know my name?" he asked suspiciously. Before Morgana could incriminate himself further Akira came to his rescue.

"He must have overheard it from the guards. We did cause a lot of attention after all," the boy lied smoothly. Morgana nodded as he followed Akira's lead. "Yeah, the Palace's Ruler was screaming his head off about the two of you had disrespected him. You can still hear him screaming his head off from here."

Ryuji blinked before he listened.

"Damn you Ryuji Sakamoto! When I get my hands on you and your damned friend I'm going to cut you apart and make you beg me for mercy!" Kamoshida's shadow was pretty far away but thanks to his loud voice both Ryuji and Akira could hear him. Ryuji rolled his eyes, "Damn that guy doesn't know when to can it. I mean, I kinda just tune it out nowadays but still, its annoying."

Any other conversation was cut off as more guards approached the three. Their bodies shifted, plate armor turning to black cloth as the shadows assumed their true forms.

"Anyways, we should talk later. We've got Shadows to beat, you two ready?" Morgana asked. Akira nodded while Ryuji gave the cat a look that questioned Morgana's sanity.

"Alright then. Come, Mercurius!" Morgana called. A hooded figure in navy clothing emerged from the torrent of light and energy that surrounded Morgana, sending Ryuji scrambling back. The blue wings emerged from the Persona's shoes as it held a golden staff in hand.

"Arsene!" The demonic thief emerged from Akira's mask, laughing diabolically as he did so. Morgana and Akira exchanged a look and grinned.

"Magarudyne!"

"Maeigaon!"

...

<u>Later that night:</u>

"So..." Morgana began as he sat on the windowsill of Akira's rather cluttered room. "It looks like time itself has reset, by the looks of it."

"Not completely though," Akira corrected. "For some reason, the Persona Compendium kept track of all of the Personas I've gathered throughout all of these resets. I still have our weapons, gear, and other things. Like your scarf or Sae-san's business card. I still have all the cash that I got previously, strangely enough."

Morgana tilted his head thoughtfully before he slumped in defeat, "Yeah, I've got no idea what's going on either. I've got all of my memories but it doesn't look like they're much help at all. Sorry..."

Akira shook his head before petting Morgana on the head. The cat purred and leaned into the boy's hand. Normally he would only let the girls pet him like this, but he was so happy to not be alone again that he was willing to let Akira do it.

"The fact that you remember me is more than enough," Akira reassured him. "Don't worry about the details. We'll be able to figure it out between the two of us."

Morgana nodded as the two took what comfort they could from the other's presence.

"So... you said that you have all the money you got previously right?" Morgana asked, his eyes gleaming eagerly. The human chuckled before reaching into his bag before pulling out a couple plastic containers containing several rolls of sushi each.

"Don't eat too much or you'll get fat," Akira teased as he opened up the boxes, "Shadows might find it easier to hit you that way."

"Don't care, I demand sushi. Now!" Morgana grinned as Akira laid out his tribute before the feline king. The rolls of rice and fish barely managed to last a bit longer than the Shadows that were slaughtered earlier that day.

[Persona 5], [Star Wars]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Ryuji stood on the Balcony overseeing all of Coruscant. "Man, this is so cool! Seeing places I've only watched in movies as if they were real life! Hey Akira, think we could get a lightsaber as a souvenir?"

Morgana stood on Akira's shoulder. "Futaba and I read most of the entries on the Star Wars wikipedia. Lightsabers are hard to come by, though they are useful door openers."

Akira stared out at the Senate floor and thought out loud to himself, "We should do it."

Morgana gave him a questioning look, to which Akira turned and smirked at the cat. "I've been thinking about these loops. We should declare ourselves to everyone across the multiverse."

Ryuji gave him an excited expression. "Yeah, that's more like it! Let's show everyone across the multiverse the existence of the Phantom Thieves of Hearts!"

Morgana gave a thoughtful expression. "You had an idea in mind, Joker?"

"Let's change the heart of Emperor Palpatine, force him to confess everything."

Ryuji took a step back. "Woah, are you serious?!"

Even Morgana looked surprised for a moment. "W-well, yeah, that would be a viable target. But just jumping right to the top, are you sure?"

Akira smirked at the two. "Quite. We have yet to change any hearts here, meaning Palpatine will never see it coming, or even dismiss it as a prank. If we change the hearts of anyone else, he may discover our means accidentally, thinking he was attacked through the force, and our fight will be that much harder."

Morgana scratched behind his head with his rear foot. "Ok, I'm all for it. Ryuji?"

"Oh hell yeah! That bastard is like the very personification of evil in this universe. Making him announce all his crimes over the internet sounds perfect."

Morgana nodded. "Holonet, but yeah. We're in agreement. But we need to prepare long and hard for this. It'll be our most difficult mission yet. Further, we may need to recruit some people to pull this off. A Jedi and a slicer, AKA hacker, at the least."

Ryuji replied, "That's easy, let's just find Futaba and Yosuke."

Morgana hissed at Ryuji. "You idiot, we're in another universe. Futaba and Yosuke might not even exist here!"

Ryuji shrugged. "We do, so they might too."

Akira shook his head. "Even if they do, they could be anywhere in the Galaxy. A Jedi would be easier to come by, so we should focus on the slicer. Morgana, you have any ideas?"

"As a matter of fact, I do."

A small tablet appeared on the railing overseeing the Galactic Senate. It was an article on a refueling station named Gus Treta.

[Persona 1], [Persona 2], [Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Persona Q]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

Igor was many things when it came to the aspects of the Velvet Room. Some of them are directly tied to the area itself while he manages to be a strict teacher to the Attendants.

He was also quite enamored with the room's current stance, which resembled a banquet hall, all because of one thing: His guests and their friends had decided to visit the place.

"I thought I sensed a haven in the rift," Igor muttered. "But to think the Velvet Room would adapt to this many guests...but this is unexpected. What's the purpose to this visit?"

"We kind of heard about what happened to you during the latest expansion," the boy with the earring replied. "So when Philemon found out about what happened, he understood and sent all of us together."

"He thought you needed cheering up," the young girl with the beauty mark added. "Although the fact that he brought in people who died meant he wanted to go the extra mile."

"I brought Shinjiro and Rei," the man with the spiked collar and blue watch said. "For the good half of humanity, he seemed...pretty concerned."

Igor gave out a small smile, which was odd for a man who usually had a grinning face. "Philemon," he said. "While I insist that I'm fine, the fact that you brought my guests from before Yaldaboth took my form as well as recruited the God of Death for certain aspects means you were truly concerned." He then looked at them. "And to think, some of them I thought I would never see again."

"Heh," was what the man with the beanie said. "It's not every day that you get dragged back from the sea of souls just to cheer someone out. Although, I will admit, whenever I died, I'm just glad I'm picked up by a friend instead of a heartless reaper."

"Call it paying back a debt, Shinjiro," the other man replied. "The shock I felt was genuine, as I thought you were going to assist them with the Dark Hour."

"I still did, Zen."

"That's Shinjiro for you," the man wearing the cape replied. "Even when dying, he's still a stubborn bastard."

"That reminds me...do you mind explaining the getup, Aki? You look worse than I do when it came to profiling in Kurosawa's department."

"That's exactly what I said when I first met him," the young woman in blue said.

"You look worse than I do," a man with an X-shaped scar said, just staring at them. "And that's without the Persona interfering in your job."

Somehow, that got the blue-haired male confused. "Guess there's one like me in every group," he said. "Keeps up appearances as a bad boy, yet has a soft center."

"I'm not exactly that bad," the bleached-haired male replied.

"You managed to beat up an entire biker gang because they kept your Mom up at night, Kanji," the male with orange headphones said. "It got to the point where the biker gang in question were afraid to beat us up because we were associated with you."

"How else was I supposed to make a point, Yosuke-senpai?"

The man with sunglasses just shook his head. "Either way," he muttered, "we're mostly here because we've heard about the incident in Shibuya. Specifically, the Phantom Thieves of Hearts."

"Ah yes," Igor muttered. "Pity that I've never met him for long, the man who called himself 'Joker' was an interesting guest. Hence, why I had to send Morgana in my place."

The younger brother of the man with sunglasses just stared. "That name kind of brings bad memories for us," he muttered. "But yeah, Katsuya's more informed about the situation as we've heard it from the Internet. And judging by the latest expansion, the whole 'no direct interference' clause just makes me glad that you're not that malicious."

The man with glasses and the scarf with the number one on it just snorted. "While I've seen some things during these times," he said, "this was by far the craziest. To think that we'd have a local version of HIM when we're already dealing with Nyarlathotep."

"And had the situation escalated," the woman with red hair and a fur coat said, "we'd be living in a system of blind obedience. But it's probably a good thing that we never learned about their methods, yet they're worth researching. Nanjo, is Naoya capable of doing so?"

Nanjo looked at the woman in question. "Doubtful, Kirijo," he said. "We'd need a Wild Card in order to pull that off, but that's not accounting for the ethical violations we'd have to make in order to replicate the results."

"Probably a good thing," a grey-haired male muttered. "I would have refused. Speaking of, I asked Dojima about the Phantom Thieves, and it turns out that even Adachi's aware that whoever they were targeting would not survive in prison."

"I've had a few comments about why I'm not investigating in Baseline, Senpai," the female wearing the blue hat replied. "Then again, I may have to meet up with them later in case they start noticing the Time Loops."

He then smirked. "Notify us when they've Awakened fully, Naoto."

"So," a man in a baseball uniform said, "am I the only one who's confused about how they managed to get them to confess for their sins? Because it kind of looked like their victims had buckled under the pressure of being challenged and confessed on live television."

"Does anyone have a connection to politics?" the twin-tailed woman asked them. "Probably because the last one was a man named Shiho. I'd ask Namatame, but I don't want to risk his career."

"We usually like to stay out of it as much as possible, Rise," the woman in the sentai uniform replied.

"You guys know an actual politician?" the man with the X-shaped scar asked her.

"Not just her," the woman in the red uniform replied. "After hearing his side of the story, we've kind of parted on better terms."

"It kind of helped that Yu here kept our heads cool," Yosuke added. "Otherwise, I'm not sure if Nanako would have been alive."

Yu nodded.

A young man was legitimately curious about the name. "Is she important to you?" he asked the older male.

"She's my cousin," he replied, "but we treat her like she was my sister. She was the last to be kidnapped and...well...we thought she died."

"Yes," Zen muttered. "I may have been watching you deal with that dilemma. At that point, you had rage, but there was something off in your head."

"You wanted to kill the man, didn't you?" the young man asked them. "Because he was the kidnapper."

Yosuke then sighed. "And that we thought he was the killer, Ken," he added. "The other thing that got us out of that mindset was Teddie's disappearance. Instead, we found out who the true killer was and helped bring him to justice." He then shook his head. "To think that the very same man would be helping us out in secret against Sho and MINAZUKI."

"Adachi wanted to go back to jail on his own terms," Yu replied. "I think he may have needed the help, as much as we hate to admit it."

Naoto just gave them a look. "I guess you may have changed him more than we thought, Senpai," she said.

"As for Namatame," the green-suited woman said, "he sometimes makes stays at the Amagi Inn, so Yukiko got the chance to ask him about Shiho."

Yukiko just looked at them. "He...does not like Shiho," she muttered. "At all. It's not exactly publicly known, but whenever they do meet, he gets quite an unpleasant aura around him."

"The one politician that you know that isn't corrupt," the platinum-blonde said, "and he's nervous around the guy who's trying to be Prime Minister."

"To be fair, Lisa," Katsuya muttered, "just by looking at Shiho, I kind of see the elder Sudou in his place."

"And anyone who's worked in law enforcement tends to have conflicting opinions about the Phantom Thieves," Naoto added. "On one side, they're criminals, but on the other, they're exposing the corruption."

"I know," the green-suited girl replied. "It's like they're trying to be friendly neighborhood gangsters or something."

Akihiko gave out a shrug. "But to do the things that they do," he muttered before looking at the master of the Velvet Room. "Igor, you said you met Joker?"

"Sometime after Yaldaboth revealed his true colors," Igor replied. "His skill with the Wild Card had been enhanced by that point, I could only assist him for a short while."

Everyone who knew Akihiko stared at him while the others were just outright confused.

"Huh," Shinjiro muttered. "So the protein hasn't completely taken over your brain while I was away."

"I can be insightful, too, Shinji!" Akihiko yelled, growling at his dead best friend.

"Yeah, but this? I can see Mitsuru thinking the same thing, but this is kind of unexpected."

Mitsuru gave out a groan before smiling. "Some things never change," she muttered.

"So that means that Aigis and I can be capable of doing the same thing," Yu said.

"But do we have the right?" Aigis asked him, showing a similar concerned look.

Yu gave the Anti-Shadow Suppression Weapon a stare. "I won't be considering it if you won't."

Aigis nodded. "Understood. The TV is enough."

Zen was the only one who stared at Igor with a bit of concern. "Is there anything else I can do, Servant of Philemon?" he asked the man.

Igor then chuckled. "I think being in the air of such colorful guests is enough, Chronos," he replied. "Besides, my Master brought in the effort of bringing everyone during this moment, so let's make the best of it until we leave this place. After all, we have all the time in the world at this moment."

And that's when Yukiko started laughing. "Time in the world...said to a God of Time..." she chuckled.

"It wasn't that funny," a man in a yellow hat muttered.

"Don't mind her," the green-suited woman said, face-palming. "Once she starts, there's no stopping Yukiko once she's entered the Laughing Hyena phase."

Even with the blue interior, the Velvet Room was at its liveliest with the multitude of guests. Akihiko challenged Reiji Kido, the man with the x-shaped scar on his forehead, to an arm wrestling competition, Yosuke and Mark were breakdancing to songs from Margaret's Stereo, Nando and Mitsuru were discussing business terminology, Koromaru was sticking with Shinjiro to avoid Kanji, Teddie had taken the attempt to flirt with the girls that came with Naoya and Tatsuya (with limited success and only stopping when he found out that Maki was in a relationship with Naoya), Kanji showing off to Ekichi about how much in common they had, Baofu just sitting off in the corner, the girl-talk with the four groups that the guys failed to understand, Katsuya, Naoto, and occasionally Chie talking about their jobs on the force, the Karaoke contest with Rise commenting on Ekichi's talent, and most importantly, everyone trying to prevent the return of Mystery Food X.

As with the festivities, Igor gave out one of his rare genuine smiles among the permanent one he sported. Even if they came at the request of Philemon, he couldn't help but feel touched that they would take time out of their journeys just to tend to him. Even with his services and the non-interference clause, he felt something stirring within.

'If they do Awaken,' he thought, 'I might as well see if they'd like to meet their...Senpai, so to speak. Considering the fact that the Thieves have a more...direct approach to their methods, but due to the circumstances, they had no choice but to follow his game.'

The chuckle he had was subtle that only Koromaru, Teddie, and Aigis could hear it.

'But every journey has its rocky starts. And for once, I have a long-time goal for my own as well as companions.'

Miscellaneous 16

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
Royal Straight – part 1
Author: Solaris Requiem

It took all of Akira's willpower to not immediately fall over asleep at his seat during their social studies field trip. It was bad enough the first time, even worse the second time, and it seemed to get more and more annoying as time passed. Unfortunately for him, he was pretty much forced to attend this boring talk session at the TV station.

"Now then, now that Akechi Goro has introduced himself, let us welcome in our next guest!" the male show-host announced. Akechi noticeably fixed his tie and straightened his posture, something that caught Akira's eye. He and Ryuji managed to regain their attention.

"For the first time in years, the original Detective Prince, or rather the Detective Queen, as she is known by nowadays, has finally appeared on TV again! Please welcome... Detective Naoto Shirogane!"

There was a fanfare and thunderous applause as a young woman, dressed in light blue with a navy cap on her head walked onto the stage. She had a light blue shirt, thin khaki pants, and a yellow tie. The way she walked oozed confidence and personality, and Akira could see Ann looking at her with an appraising eye while Ryuji's jaw opened. Akira did his friend a favor and closed his mouth shut.

"Whoa..." Morgana whispered as he peeked from his bag, his voice containing no small amount of awe. "She looks... just... wow..." Akira sighed good-naturedly as the cat fell head over heels for the female detective.

"She would be perfect as a model," Ann remarked as she observed how Naoto greeted the host and Akechi. "It's clear that she has a lot of experience and confidence dealing with TV and the media. She doesn't shy away from the camera and she doesn't appear to be nervous at all. I can tell that she had to deal with a lot of this kind of attention before. Plus, frankly, there are a lot of girls who would kill to have looks like hers."

Akira nodded, taking in Ann's comment before he turned back to the stage where Naoto took her seat next to Akechi.

"Now then, Miss Shirogane. Since it has been a long time since you agreed to an interview of any sort, I would like to answer a few questions that I'm sure everyone in the audience is curious about," the host began. Naoto nodded as Akechi smiled good-naturedly. However, Akira's sharp eyes were able to detect that Akechi was slightly annoyed that he was being completely ignored in favor of Naoto.

"It came as a shock for many of us when it was revealed that you were actually not a Prince, but rather a Princess. Why did you decide to hide your gender for so long?" the host asked. Naoto nodded, unbothered by the pointed question.

"The typical image of a genius detective, as seen with famous detectives such as Poirot and Holmes, has always been male. Therefore, I determined that a more masculine image would be more beneficial to me when I first started my career as a detective. I never actually claimed that I was male in the first place but due to my image as a genius detective I was given the name of the 'Detective Prince'. Thanks to several of my colleagues, I realized that I no longer needed that image of myself and that allowed me to become the detective that I am today."

Naoto chuckled. "I was informed by my colleagues that large portion of my female fans were disappointed to learn that I was actually a girl. I was also informed that for every female fan I lost I gained three more male ones." There was a loud and audible chuckle at Naoto's remark as the host transitioned into the next question.

"Now then, here's a question that I'm sure is on everyone's mind: are you currently dating someone? Or are you currently single?"

"I am currently single, there has been nobody in particular that has caught my eye in recent times. But, of course, that is all subject to change." Naoto replied smoothly. There were various whispers among the studio audience after Naoto made this statement. Akira could feel Morgana shift around in his bag, a bit frustrated that he had not been able to attain a human form just yet.

"Oh really?" the host pressed, "What kind of person would you want to-"

"Excuse me ma'am," Akechi interrupted. "I believe that it would be best to move onto the main topic of this program rather than to ask about Detective Shirogane's love interests. Not that I myself am curious, of course. It is just that it would not be polite to delve too deep into her romantic life."

"Agreed," Naoto nodded to Akechi. "I believe I was called here to discuss the rumored 'Phantom Thieves of Heart' rather than my own love interests. That issue is more relevant to this society than what kind of person I am currently interested in."

The male host looked a bit upset but moved on regardless. "Fair enough. We have gotten Detective Goro's opinion on the matter of the Phantom Thieves. He says that they are a threat; that their powers of 'changing the hearts of people' can be used to perpetuate more crime. What are your opinions on the matter?"

Naoto considers this before she responds, "Yes, this so called 'heart stealing'... the ability to make criminals suddenly confess their crimes. A sudden change of heart, especially of this nature, is immediately suspicious and unnatural. However, I wish to remain 'cautiously optimistic' as some people say," Naoto asserts. Both Akechi and the hosts are caught off guard by this.

"Could you elaborate on this?" The host asks. Naoto obliges with a nod.

"Take, for example, a sword. In the right hands it can be used to protect and defend people. In the wrong hands, tragedy and disaster follow in its wake. It is not the sword's fault; but rather the intent of the person that wields it. The same argument can be applied loosely to the

Phantom Thieves of Heart. With their powers they chose not to create more crimes, but rather, to bring crimes to light that the police never knew existed. Instead of choosing to spread chaos, they gave people hope."

"Giving people hope?" The host asked. Akira, Ryuji, Ann, and Morgana were all paying very close attention to what was being said. In fact, Ryuji actually looked a little bit teary and rubbed his eyes a bit.

Naoto nodded, "Precisely. The society that we live is not flawless; I myself faced major discrimination and prejudice within the police department due to my age. Things only got worse when my real gender came out. Eventually, this prejudice eventually became one of the reasons why I became a private investigator rather than one that worked solely for the police." The Looper turned to the female host. "I am sure that you know exactly what I am talking about, miss."

The host bit her lip but did not say anything. Naoto nodded and continued. "The feeling of being absolutely powerless without any way to change... That is a feeling that I learned about a long time ago. Then, suddenly, the Phantom Thieves do something that nobody else could do; they make the people who oppress and manipulate others change and right their wrongs from their seat of power. In doing so, they allow for people to believe that life can change, as long as they do not lose heart or spirit. That is how they inspire hope."

"I-I see..." Akechi frowned, perplexed and confused about the answer that was given.

The male host nodded and moved the conversation further along. "Alright then, we currently have students from Shujin Academy. You there young man," he stood up and brought his microphone to Akira. "What is your opinion about the Phantom Thieves? Hypothetically speaking, what are your thoughts about them if they were real?"

Akira looked up, making eye contact not with Akechi or the announcers, but Naoto herself and spoke: "They're justice themselves." This time around, there was a stronger conviction in his voice than before.

"That is a... very strong response," Akechi remarked. Naoto herself was surprised at his response but a nod of understanding was given to Akira.

"Given the fact that they are from the very same school that Kamoshida was from, it is understandable," Naoto began. "Teachers in general have a lot of influence on their students for the better or worse. One student even tried to commit suicide recently. The students themselves were unable to even do a single thing without risking expulsion or worse. Then suddenly, the teacher confesses, apologizes, and turns himself in for his crimes. In a single action, the school changes for the better," Naoto smiled. "Of course, I am not endorsing or approving of their actions directly but the optimist in my wishes to give them the benefit of the doubt. They have the potential to change society for the better or worse. I, and everyone else in the entirety of Japan, will be watching them closely."

Naoto closed her eyes. "How they wield this power of theirs is dependent on their own intent. Will they use it change society for the better? Or will they create despair and chaos instead of hope? Only time will tell. But I, as do the people who were oppressed and suffered from both

Madarame and Kamoshida's actions, hope that the Phantom Thieves continue to strive towards justice."

...

"Man... This field trip ended up being pretty damn good..." Ryuji had a wide grin on his face. The same went for Ann and Morgana, the former of which displayed it with a cheery demeanor and a smile. Even Akira himself was in a pretty good mood, especially after being acknowledged openly for that kind of thing. It was a very... warm and refreshing feeling. One that was even better than the time after they got a 60% approval rating on the Phan-site.

"Yeah... It's really nice to finally get someone who understands what we're trying to do," Ann replied before she frowned. "But still, what Detective Akechi said about the the Phantoms being judged by the law is kind of bothering me."

"Don't worry about it Lady Ann," Morgana replied. "Like Lady Naoto said, we are doing something that the police cannot do. We're carrying out our own justice and we're giving people hope. That's all that really matters, no matter what the other detective said."

"Oh, so you're calling her that too?" Ann teased, "You've fallen for Naoto, haven't you?"

Although Morgana's fur hid away the sudden blush it was clear that he was embarrassed, "I just admire her sense of justice and inner strength. That's all!"

Ann whistled. "I wouldn't blame you. With a body like that she'd easily make it to the top three in my agency." Morgana had the knowledge to remain silent without sticking another paw in his mouth.

"Anyways, I gotta go take a leak. Be right back!" Ryuji hollered as he dashed off. Ann rolled his eyes.

"He shouldn't have drunk so much water... Anyway, I'll meet you back in the front later." Ann replied as she walked forward. Akira leaned against the wall as Morgana's his in his bag for the time being. He was about to pull out his phone to wait for the inevitable meeting with Akechi when a distinctly different voice caught his attention.

"Excuse me," a calm voice called. Akira turned and was surprised to see Naoto Shirogane walk his way.

"Can I help you, Detective?" he asked as Naoto walked closer to him. It seemed that Akechi was nowhere near him this time.

"It is nothing much. It is just that you remind me of a dear friend of mine," Naoto said with a gentle smile. "The both of you have the same... aura of determination if you will. For a moment when you spoke I suddenly was reminded of him."

"Was he your boyfriend?" Akira asked. Naoto chuckled before she shook her head.

"No. He was just a good friend of mine. But regardless, considering what kind of person his was... I think it would be definitely worth my time to get to know you better. If you do not

mind of course," Naoto offered.

Akira considered this. This was something that had not happened previously in the resets. But he couldn't help but notice something very... different about Naoto. It only took a moment for him to make his decision.

"I would be happy to," Akira responded. He could feel Morgana shift around a bit, happy at the current scenario.

"Would you mind if I brought my cat along?"

"Oh you mean the one in your bag right now?" Naoto asked before she smiled at Akira's shocked expression. "Don't worry, your secret is safe with me. But no, I wouldn't mind. I'm fond of both cats and dogs."

"Glad to hear it. I think he'll like you a lot," Akira said. Naoto nodded before she pulled out a small envelope and handed it over to Akira.

"This envelope contains my contact information as well as a small gift to thank for your indulging in my curiosity," she responds. "I believe that it will be of great use to you in the near future."

Akira took the envelope and felt a few small objects inside of the paper container. "Did you give me a wedding ring?"

Naoto was flustered for a second before she regained composure, "If I were to give you something that important I would have given you a small box rather than a paper envelope. But anyway, I do hope you talk to you soon. Until then."

With that the two of them parted with Naoto began to walk back into the crowd with Akira watching her closely. Morgana popped out of his bag again and lay his head on the human's shoulder.

"You gonna open it?" Morgana asked curiously, "It's not like we have anything else to do until Ryuji and Lady Ann get back."

Akira nodded before he undid the paper stamp that sealed the envelope shut. With that impediment gone, Morgana looked over his shoulder to see what was inside and froze. Sitting almost inconspicuously against clean and professional looking business card were five small objects that looked very familiar to the two Phantom Thieves.

"Those are Revival Beads!" Morgana hissed as Akira stowed the envelope away into his jacket pocket and took out the business card separately for safe-keeping. "Where did she get those?!"

Akira frowned as he stared at the business card, written in a navy blue with a fancy gold font. "We need to discuss this with everyone else." But then time stopped for a moment, as he heard a familiar voice call to him.

I am thou, thou art I...
Thou hast acquired a new vow.
It shall become the wings of rebellion that breaketh thy chains of captivity.
With the birth of the Aeon Persona, I have obtained the winds of blessing that shall lead to freedom and new power...

Akira frowned as he the new link between Naoto and him was formed. It was different than the one he usually got from Akechi, and that confused him utterly.

What was going on? What had changed with this reset?

[Persona 5], [Kids Next Door]
(no title)
Author: Alastair Dragovich

Akira Woke up on a particularly sunny afternoon to find himself holding what looked to be a childish wooden, western styled sword. He looked around as he sent off a Ping to see that a couple members of his team, Ann and Ryuji, were looking at him and giving him the signal that they were Looping, while Yusuke and Fubata were still working on some strange contraption that looked like it belonged in a junkyard. Morgana was nowhere to be seen, but hopefully they'd find them before too long. Then again, with 7 Pings and the tendency for each sector to have roughly five members, they may be the only ones Awake besides the native Loopers.

Akira checked his memories. It seems this time the details were ENORMOUSLY different, and as such probably a Fused Loop. As it turned out, there were a lot of strangely themed adult supervillains this loop who would go about annoying and pestering children with things that they didn't like, like forcing them to brush their teeth or feeding them too much food or keeping them out of the adults only pool. One even stole children's candy.

However, not all kids took this lying down, and through the use of brainwashing technology and a healthy dosage of refuge in audacity, the kids formed a secret organization to fight against what they called 'Adult Tyranny' and battled them day in and day out. Using '2 X 4' technology, which was, indeed, made out of scrap materials that kids found lying around in junkyards or in their houses, they were able to make things from lasers to supercomputers to even a *freaking moon base*.

Feeling envious that their hideout was a mere, earthbound treehouse, Akira motioned to his two aware teammates for a team meeting.

"So, we're kids this time, huh?" Ryuji said rubbing the back of his head. "Well, at least we're still doing what we do best. Kicking the butt of evil, rotten adults."

"Are you sure they're evil though, or just crazy?" Ann said doubtfully. "I mean, the Toiletnator? What's he supposed to do, force kids to-"

Before Ann could go through with that strange and horrific line of thought, one of the base's different alarms went off. Searching his memories, Akira straightened up and darted over to

the console to receive the message.

"Sector P reporting," Akira saluted. "What's the situation..."

"Numbah One," Nigel said with a coy smile. "I'm afraid we've got ourselves a bit of a Loopy situation."

"Loopy- Oh, right," The Leader of the Phantom Thieves cleared his throat. "Myself and Numbahs Ten-Oh and Four-Oh are well Anchored, but the rest of the team isn't."

"N-numbah Oh-One-Oh?" Yusuke turned to his leader in concern only to be given a patient, 'wait until later' gesture in response.

"Understood. We'll set up a private call later," Nigel said with a smile. "That said, my team could use a bit of help with something. It seems Father, UnAwake as he is, is a bit trickier than usual, and has stolen the blue-prints for the decommissioning device. Probably as some sort of plot to retrieve the memories of former KnD operatives turned Adult."

The Anchor for the KnD Loops lowered his sunglasses. "We were hoping to see your team's expertise up close, 'Phantom Thieves of the KnD'."

A smile quickly grew on the leader of 'Sector P's' face as he turned to his team. Already, the team was pulling on their masks, which were purely cosmetic this Loop. He turned back to Numbah One, mask in place with nary a movement to suggest it didn't simply just come into existence onto their face.

"You can watch us if you can, but I think we've been told we're too fast for eyes."

Immediately, Skull and Panther groaned.

"We really should have seen that coming," They murmured, with their UnAwake teammates mostly just looking on in confusion.

[Persona 5], [???]
Playing the Game
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Akira looked at the book and almost threw it in the dumpster where it belonged. Last time he read the book, he tried romancing them all as it suggested and ended up getting thrashed when they found out. But something about this book was different. The author, for example, was different. He felt he had heard the name "Jiraiya" from somewhere. He opened the book and started flipping through the pages.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Alastair Dragovich

Akira hummed to himself as he waited at his usual spot at the Big Bang Burger. Morgana, who didn't remember anything this time, sadly, was safely tucked away in his bag while they waited on the Burger for the current rank of the Big Bang Burger Challenge, the Gravity Burger. It wasn't the healthiest of challenges to partake in, but considering he was stuck in a time loop he probably wouldn't end up suffering any of the consequences.

"Here you go sir!" The waitress placed the obscenely large burger in front of him. "The Gravity Burger! A burger so large, it almost has its own gravity field!"

"Umm, but it should already have one though."

The waitress tilted her head at Akira's statement. "....excuse me?"

"Technically, all things have a gravitational pull on all other things, according to basic physics," he pointed out, something that had been bothering him ever since he picked up that factoid during his studies.

"W-W-well-"

Before the waitress could finish her statement, however, a loud crack echoed out through the restaurant. It took a few seconds for Akira to realize that the noise had come from... the burger?

"O-oh no. Oh nononononono," The waitress dropped her plate as she turned around, running for the back.

"...Umm... what just happened?" Morgana asked, eyeing the burger suspiciously. The thing responded with another cracking sound.

"Young man!" The manager came out with the waitress. "Did that burger make another cracking sound while she came to get me?"

Akira, thoroughly confused, could only nod. The manager's face paled. He pulled out a strange, rectangular device with two antenna sticking out of it and motioned for Akira to stand next to him. The other customers, also looking nervous, followed suit as the manager fiddled with the device.

"Sir, what exactly is going on?" Akira asked, his Guts failing to steady him as his intuition began howling like a crazed monkey.

"Young man," the man's face was frowning in a dour sort of manner. "If this device is reading things correctly, then we are literally one hair's breadth away from annihilation."

"A-Annihilation!?"

He nodded. "You see, one of the men in charge of making burgers was never fond of false advertising. Every burger we make has to relate to its name in some manner, in their mind. Normally, these burgers end in disaster, due to poor taste."

The poor manager gulped and dabbed at his now damp forehead. "However, with the infamous Gravity Burger, he succeeded. Somehow, he managed to cram enough meat, lettuce, tomatoes, and other ingredients into a small, compact space. This normally wouldn't be a problem... except a scientist had rushed over to warn us that they had detected a gravitational field so powerful, it could create a miniature black hole."

'....what...?'

As Akira stared on in disbelief and fascination, the manager continued the tale. "This, naturally, worried a lot of people. Unfortunately, the same process that created this deathtrap of a burger not only saved us a lot of money, in defiance against all known laws of economics, but the density meant that no one could actually complete the challenge and, with the waver we had you sign, we could extort the populace for even more money for failing what should be an impossible challenge."

The hero's eyes widened as the waitress spoke up. "So now we have to keep making these things. But should the process be messed up even the slightest bit, then it wouldn't take much more matter to cause it to... collapse."

"SO NO ONE. MOVE. A MUSCLE."

After the manager bellowed that out, everyone froze, eyeing the burger cautiously. It was at that moment that Akira's bag, still near the burger, rustled.

"Hey, what's all the commotion about?" Morgana asked as he poked his head out, a visible tuft of hair coming out with him.

A visible tuft that floated down onto the burger.

"Oh Go- EVERYONE EVACUATE THE CITY!"

The crowd then panicked, screaming and scrambling to get out.

"What the hell?" Morgana looked to the burger, which was now looking a little funny. "A bit of fur landed on it. Do you seriously expect to believe that it will- OH NO AKIRA HELP ME!"

But it was too late. In an instant, Morgana was forcibly pulled into the burger's gravitational field. Without even a chance to reach out his hand, the leader of the Phantom Thieves watched as one of his oldest teammates was sucked in between the buns of the now distorted burger along with the table, the windows, and the bystanders on the other side of the windows.

As the screams of the soon to be dead rang out, Akira swiftly grabbed the counter behind him, hanging on for dear life as the manager, clawing and scrabbling at the tile floor, was dragged screaming into the event horizon. He didn't have much time to think on it, though, when he heard a new cracking sound.

The sound of the counter cracking to be specific.

With a terrified cry, the Phantom Thief of Heart went screaming to his death for the first time since his life began looping through time.

...

Akira paused mid-step outside of Sojiro's apartment. As his mind processed everything, he only had one thing to say.

"WHAT THE FUCK!?"

[Persona 4]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

Everyone Awake had just stared at the concoction that was Mystery Food X. Yu, Yosuke, Chie, Yukiko, Kanji, Rise, Teddie, Naoto, Nanako, Marie, Dojima...even Igor and Adachi had been here to see it.

"I don't know what that thing is," Adachi said, "but I can confirm that even spoiled cabbage combined with prison food would taste better than that."

"I have seen many things in my lifetime," Igor added, nose plugs in his area. "But NEVER have I seen anything that has combines the odor of Abaddon with the composition of Legion that hasn't resulted in a Persona."

Ryotaro Dojima then groaned. "Nanako," he said, "we're ordering from Aika's."

"Okay, Daddy," she replied, a little nervous. "It smells funny either way."

Marie then groaned. "And Margaret said that my chocolate was unnerving to be around," she muttered, writing something. "If this ends up in my grave, you guys might have an advantage in using poisoned weaponry."

Now, normally, Yosuke would probably gloat and say 'I told you so' concerning what happens when they let Yukiko, Chie, and Rise in the kitchen, but this time, well...

"Please tell me there's a location we can safely dispose of this," he muttered. "Every time this thing shows up, we're either going to be stuck with it all day, or it turns into a Shadow."

"Our cooking isn't THAT bad!" Chie yelled.

"The latter only happens when Margaret makes Mystery Food X, Chie," Marie said. "Or any of the other residents of the Velvet Room, Elizabeth included."

"Before we can confirm a place for this un-bear-able mix of food," Teddie exclaimed, glad that he decided to be in human form, "can I say that you are not throwing it into the TV?"

"Agreed," Igor replied. "The Sea of Souls is someplace that the odor can do without. That, and someone you know does not want to remember the experience."

Adachi blinked. "Sea of Souls?" he asked him. "Is that some sort of afterlife?"

Yu sighed. "Kind of," he said. "Igor knows more about that subject than I do, and we've only been there a few times. What we can confirm is that it's where Mayumi Yamano, Saki Konishi, and King Moron go when they were murdered."

"And Mom," Nanako replied, somber.

Adachi gave out a small frown when he realized it was a sensitive subject. "Sorry I asked, then," he muttered.

Yosuke groaned. "So," he muttered, "how long until the biohazard squad shows up, Yukiko?"

"They'll be here in a few minutes," Yukiko replied, putting her cell-phone away. "Although we might have to move to another place while they decontaminate the area."

"And we'll probably stay at the Amagi Inn for a few days, too," Dojima added. "If you don't mind."

Yu then sighed. "Well," he said, "Nanako would have a good time, at least. Not sure about Adachi."

Adachi gave Yu a look. "I did promise you that I wouldn't be causing trouble," the former killer replied. "I never met up with Mayumi Yamano and left Saki alone."

"Yeah, but it didn't stop the death of King Moron," Kanji replied.

"That one was out of my control. Morooka's cause of death was blunt force trauma with a baseball bat, and the killer was Mitsuo Kubo, who had a bit of an attention complex."

Dojima looked at Adachi. "And yet, I start to wonder how good of an officer you can be when you're not focused on the whole thing," he muttered. "Or acting like a rookie."

Adachi gave out a small glance. "A Persona User on the police force," he muttered. "I'm pretty sure Shirogane and Satonaka would fall under that."

"That," Naoto replied, "and the only other one we know of is Katsuya Suou. I tend to run into him on certain cases."

Chie gave Adachi a look. "Dojima told you?" she asked him, Adachi giving out a nod in reply. "Right. Anything I should know about?"

"If you're going to be under his wing, you have to know how he likes his coffee."

"This is kind of weird, seeing him act affable to us," Rise whispered to Yu, who, out of the entire Investigation Team, was the closest to the former killer. "I was under the impression that if he Awakened, he'd hate our guts."

Yu's response...was a little unexpected.

"Maybe, but remember that he did help us out against Hi-no-Kagutsuchi. That, and even though he's keeping his promise, he's more aware about the circumstances changing from 'solitary confinement' to 'house arrest.'"

Adachi then gave Yu a look. "I heard that," he said, "and you're not wrong on the house arrest. Dojima and Nanako are considered my Wardens in this case, and...they're pretty effective."

And that's when a knock on the door was heard.

"I'll get it," Dojima replied. "Try not to start a fight. We do not want that thing spilling onto the table and floor."

The others nodded as he opened the door.

"Ryotaro Dojima?" a voice asked him, the man nodding. "Where is the offending odor?"

"Right this way," he said, leading them towards the barrel in question.

The head of the biohazard group, however, only said, "Men, we've got another Mystery Food X in the area."

"Another?" Dojima asked him. "You mean, this has happened before?"

The biohazard unit's leader nodded. "We get calls from the Kirijo Group about this every now and then," he muttered. "The last one was triggered when someone's cooking got overexposed to egg-whites and protein products. The dish looked bad on its own, but adding that just triggered a reaction."

"This is why we let Senpai do the cooking," Naoto said to Adachi. "Less likely for this to happen."

Adachi got the idea instantly. "Not going to argue with that after seeing...that...for the first time," he muttered.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

"Well," Morgana said, "at least Sojiro was kind enough to let us have a TV...although I wouldn't recommend jumping in it."

Akira nodded, remembering Naoto Shirogane's explanation on how they became Persona Users. "Everyone has their method of using Personas," he added. "And considering the only entrance is in a Junes in the middle of nowhere...or at least, the only Entrance and Exit...it's best not to risk it." He then looked at the talking cat from the Metaverse. "Up for a movie?"

"We've got time before palace raiding. Which one do you have in mind?"

That's when he heard a knock on the door.

"It's unlocked."

The door opened with footsteps ascending the staircase to reveal a blond-haired male classmate.

"Hey, Boss," he said. "You Awake?"

"Yeah, and the Nose is Anchored from what Morgana told me." He then smiled. "Long time no see, Ryuji."

Ryuji gave out a grin. "Same to you, Akira." He then noticed the set up. "Sometimes, I wonder if Sojiro is Awake in order to give you that kind of entertainment system...and is that a PS4?"

"Yeah," Morgana said, hopping onto the bed. "Futuba helped us set up the system."

He then looked at them. "So, no plans for going out?" he asked them.

"We're technically under house arrest," Akira replied. "The cell's just fancier because of good behavior. Either way, we were thinking of having movie night before going through Kamoshida's Palace again."

He nodded as they looked at this. "What were you guys thinking of watching?" he asked them.

"22 Jump Street."

"A Cop Drama?" Akira nodded, Ryuji just sitting on the bed. "Well, someone's interested in looking at the enemy."

"That's not exactly true," Morgana replied. "They're just...less corrupt. Kind of like the few cops in this Branch that are Awake. Like Naoto and those people she mentioned that she's both close to and have met."

Ryuji got the idea. "And if it wasn't for jurisdictional friction," he said, "they'd have probably stopped the beatings altogether. At least, that's my guess."

"Considering that one of them was a bully hunter," Akira replied, "yeah, Officer Satonaka would have."

...

(After the movie)

They were kind of stunned at the whole thing, but there was one part that stuck out in their heads.

"Akira," Ryuji said, "would I really be that vocal?"

"You tend to be outspoken," Akira replied. "And yes, I may have seen you do it when you were sent to the Interrogation Room with me in front of Sae or when Sojiro confronted me."

Ryuji gave out a nervous chuckle as he laid down on the bed. "Yeah, I know I'm a loudmouth, but Makoto and Futuba are our friends. Then again, be glad that neither Sojiro or Sae have tasers."

Akira and Morgana nodded as they remembered that scene.

"That reminds me," Morgana muttered, "how'd they get Channing Tatum for Kingsmen when he was this loud?"

"Maybe he's that good of an actor," Ryuji replied. "It's not often you see the transition from loudmouth to sharp-dressed butt-kicker."

And that's when they heard Akira's phone play one of their battle themes as a message was sent.

It was from Caroline and Justine, and from the tone of their expressions, Akira knew this was big.

"What, did we miss the deadline?" Ryuji asked him.

"Worse," Akira replied. "Their sister is coming to visit."

Morgana gave out a look of complete and total shock...before realizing something. "Ask them which one," he muttered.

Akira texted that and...the reply...

"The one that left the Velvet Room and curb-stomps humanity's desire for death on a yearly basis," he read.

The total shock face had returned on the cat, leaving Ryuji confused.

"Caroline and Justine have sisters?" Ryuji asked them.

"Two sisters, one brother, and three friends," Akira replied. "And from what I've heard, every single one of them are insanely powerful due to the Nose training them."

Ryuji cringed. "And...why is this one feared?"

"Because Elizabeth's the only one of them that has the power of the Wild Card," Morgana replied. "She just prefers using Thanatos as it reminds her of an old friend."

Ryuji got the idea, remembering how Akira can be deadly with multiple Personas. "What's your order, Joker?" he asked, going into business mode.

"Gather the team, Skull," Akira replied. "If we're going to end up fighting her, I need everyone with me. Caroline and Justine are powerful, but Elizabeth's stronger than they are."

"You might want to remove the Orb, too," Morgana added. "If it's one thing the residents of the Velvet Room hate, it's the Omnipotent Orb."

Ryuji nodded, bringing out his smart phone to contact Ann, Yusuke, Futuba, Makoto, and Haru, hoping they were Awake.

They needed everyone on hand in order to calm this terror down.

[Persona 5], [Jurassic Park]
Dinosaur Eden (title added by compiler) – parts 1 and 2
Author: GarnettFoxy

"Well this is new." Akira mused as he opened the envelope addressed to him and Morgana, on his shoulder said cat was awake and tense.

"Be careful Joker it might be a trick." He cautioned, a pair of tickets fell out of the letter as Akira unfolded it smirked a little at the bold opening title.

A prize you have to be Loopy to say no to!

"Subtlety, you'd have think they would have heard of it." Akira chuckled skimming over the letter, he'd 'Won' an all expenses paid month long trip for him and Morgana to the world famous Jurassic World resort. He pulled out his frantically beeping phone checking his messages seeing that Ryuji and Ann had also apparently gotten the prize envelopes and where asking if they should go or not.

After a moment of thought he smirked and typed his reply.

'Pack for central America'

…

The quartet of Phantom Thieves where met off the boat by a Miss Hammond who had apparently been the one to organize the sweepstakes they had 'Won'. While apparently the same age as them the teen was as tall as a grown woman, was obviously muscular under the army styled coat she was wearing in the tropical heat, and her neck and cheek was three thick scars running diagonally across them.

She grinned as they stepped off the boat "Welcome to Jurassic World, if you'll come with me we'll start you off with a personal tour of the offices and other behind the scenes goings off of Jurassic World. Your bags will be waiting in your interconnected rooms when the tour is finished."

They where dragged into her office the woman pinging as she locked the door.

"We're awake, now what the hell is going on." The woman sighed sitting on the edge of her desk.

"That makes this a lot easier." She smiled offering a hand "Roxanne Hammond, native Jurassic Park/World looper."

"Akira, Morgana, Ann and Ryuji native Persona loopers." Akira smirked shaking her hand "Now what's the catch? You had to have a reason for this." Roxanne sighed.

"The prize thing was just to get you here I'll admit. And don't worry no matter what happens I'm not kicking you off the island you get to enjoy the VIP treatment no strings."

"Your dodging the question."

"I'm just making things clear." Roxanne huffed "this is just an offer, you can take it or leave it at your leasure I'm not forcing you." She rapped her claw like nails on the desk "I'm the heir to Jurassic World, only a few years from taking it over after dad...Well I have reason to believe that Jurassic World is going to be ruined, burnt to the ground if I don't do anything to change it but I don't have the power to do so. Every Jurassic World loop a monster is created known as the Indominus Rex, a Hybrid monstrosity-"

"I checked online, aren't all the Dinosaurs here by definition 'Hybrid monstrosity's'?" Ann questioned, Roxanne grinned showing to many sharp teeth to be normal.

"The normal Dinosaurs contain only the DNA of a single species of Dinosaur and some animal DNA needed to fill in the gaps and help them survive in the modern world. For example the grazing Dinosaurs like Stegosaurs and Triceratops have bovine DNA added as otherwise they wouldn't be able to digest Grass. The Indominus Rex on the other hand is a hybrid of some of the most deadly dinosaurs and animals on the planet. Raptor, Spinosaur....T.rex, viper.....Human."

"Wait some guy makes Dinosaur human....things?!" Ryuji yelped.

"Thing singular....Well it was plural at first as in baseline it had a sister. She ate them." Roxanne sighed "I don't have proof he's made it, yet. What I would like is you to find evidence that Henry Wu is either planning or has created the Indomnius Rex and either bring me the evidence so I can have it destroyed before it slaughters half the park. Or change his heart so that he never creates it in the first place....And if that is the case, I would like to join you in changing his heart." She grinned again gold eyes glinting coldly "I more then know my way around a fight. And as for payment, I'll reward you handsomly from my subspace pocket, and you'll gain favors with all of us Dinosaur Loopers as the Indominus is one of our most hated adversary's."

The four shared a look and nodded Akira pulling out his phone

"You said his names Henry Wu yes?"

...

'*Candidate found'* Roxanne sighed hearing the voice of the Meta-Nav.

"Looks like we're in business, so Miss Hammond where would Wu think of as his palace." Roxanne smiled.

"Please, just call me Roxy, as for where now that's easy he's the head of the DNA labs the only person he answers to is Masrani." The Meta-Nav chirped it's confimation once more. "As for what....Uhrm.....His own island?"

'No candidates found.'

"We're already on an island so his cognition wouldn't distort like that." Morgana sighed, Roxy hummed and looked to Ann.

"Uhrm....Can you translate cat for me?"

"Research facility?" Ryuji tried getting another negative. "Damn it."

Ann hummed deep in thought "He's creating his own Dinosaur, an entirely new species....Kind of like God creating life in the garden of Eden."

'Result found'

"Jesus he's that deluded?" Roxanne sighed shaking her head as she got off the desk "Come on there's a old matanence tunnel that leads almost directly to the labs, I don't have actual access to the DNA lab but that should be close enough."

•••

The 'Garden' looked like a twisted cancerous nightmare trees with neon colored leaves and trunks twisting in way no earthly plant could replicate, flowers with stems threatening to snap under the weight of hideous growths, instead of the sounds of flourishing life there was deathly silence broken only by heinous screams of no creature that should have existed.

"Well this place looks fuuuuuun." Ryuji sighed adjusting his mask before noticing something "Uhhh...Ain't we missing someone?"

Morgana brushed his self off frowning "Lady Hammond seems to have failed to follow us."

A hot puff of air that stank of rotting meat made the four of them freeze "Sorry I think my cognition's fucked up." Ann squealed as she was nudged a sheepish looking T-Rex peering out of the trees.

"What the hell?!"

"....Ya I didn't mention. In my baseline I'm a.....Well I'm a T-Rex."

"...And you didn't think that would be relevant information?" Joker deadpanned. The Rex shrugged with it's tiny arms.

"Sorry I didn't think it'd effect me like this....I wonder...." Roxy closed her eyes and seemed to vanish before their eyes. Before they could question it there was a triumphant shriek and a

Velociraptor jumped out from the bush grinning. "Ha! Thank you every single Shapeshifter I have ever been."

"....This isn't even the weirdest thing we've experienced let's just go."

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

'Another Loop,' Akira thought within the classroom, 'another Yasogami variant.' "So," he muttered, looking at the Investigation Team, "what's so significant about the Group Date Cafe?"

The utter silence...other than Yu labeling the chopsticks for a possible King's Game...was enough for him to show that he's probably going to get an awkward explanation.

"Bro," Yosuke said to Yu, "we've been over this."

Yu looked disappointed. "It just a conversation starter," he muttered.

Kanji gave Akira a look. "It's something that happens every time we have a Culture Festival," he explained.

Akira's blank stare just brought an even more awkward silence.

"He's not kidding," Yosuke replied. "At first, it was utter curiosity, but then it turned into something embarrassing. And every time we try to change it, it's still the majority vote."

Chie then groaned. "We need to put more than one slip in there that changes it," she muttered.

"Still not answering my question," Akira said.

Yosuke then sighed. "Well, it would be just guys and girls just sitting on both sides of the table trying to make small talk," he said, "but every time, there's always an uneven amount and one of us has to sit at the girls side. And it's either me...or Yu."

Akira nodded as he tapped it in his smart phone. "And the chopsticks...is this because we never finished the King's Game at Paulowina Mall's nightclub?"

"If I recall," Chie muttered, "you two managed to take the atmosphere in way too much and started sword-fighting with chopsticks the moment Narukami drew the red one. You said something about being the Joker that would 'overthrow the King.'"

"Yeah, that was fun," Yu said, looking at Akira. "We should do that again sometime."

Yosuke face-palmed. "Why is it that every Wild Card we know has to be an outright goofball?" he muttered. He then brought their attention. "Okay, we have six people, so we have the usual plan in mind."

Kanji then groaned. "Let me guess, one of us has to be on the girls' side?" At that moment, Akira found himself the furthest from Chie and Yukiko. "SERIOUSLY!?! HIM, TOO!"

"Hurry and take a seat please," Akira said, in a falsetto tone.

"He's learning," Yu muttered. "I can't tell if I'm proud or not."

"I'm starting to think you're a weird influence on him, Bro," Yosuke said.

It didn't take long for the guys to be seated. As usual, Yosuke was seated across from the guy while Yu took Daisuke's usual spot.

"Okay," Yosuke muttered, "I can't believe I'm doing this, but we're going to go for the question box."

"Wasn't that Teddie's suggestion during the Group Date in the Rift Between Time?" Kanji asked them.

"Rift between what?" Akira asked them, falsetto still present.

Yu gave him a stare. "It's a place between Space and Time where we meet Zen, Rei, and S.E.E.S. in a fake Yasogami High," he replied. "That reminds me, you'll meet up with fellow Wild Card Makoto...sometimes he goes by Minato."

Yosuke then groaned. "Not exactly a good approach when he's in character," he muttered, bringing out a tissue box and six slips of paper. "Now, write down a question and put it in the box, then we'll randomly take one out after shaking it, just to make it interesting. We'll go Clockwise for this one by position of the box. And Kanji...try not to be too specific."

"Alright, alright," Kanji said, writing his down and putting it in the box.

After a minute of silence with Yosuke shaking the box, he was the first to draw a card.

"Okay," Yosuke said, "this one says, 'Can you keep up with me in a...steak-eating contest'? Chie, is that yours?"

Chie was startled. "I had no idea that you'd pick THAT one!" she yelled.

"Well, to be fair, it's kind of obvious that my wallet and I would collapse faster than you would." He then looked at Akira. "I think that question was meant for you."

Kanji was up next as he drew one...and was amazed. "Wait, what is this?" he asked them.

Much to their shock, Akira had changed into his Joker Outfit without either of them looking, giving Kanji the look.

The question...was the calling card of the Phantom Thieves.

"This just got awkward pretty fast," Yosuke muttered.

"I think she's trying to steal your heart," Yu commented. "He's adapted quite well."

"Seriously!?!" Kanji yelled. "Why is it always me?"

"We haven't even gone a full round," Chie muttered, "and already, things are going off the rails."

Without a beat, Yu was next.

"So, what kind of girl do you like?" he read. "Let's see...if you want an honest answer, I'd have to say...any preference but the creepy type after the incident in the Amagi Inn during baseline."

...And it just got even more awkward.

"No wonder Margaret called you a man-whore," Yosuke muttered. "You're up next, Chie."

Chie blushed as she brought out a sentence. "So, what do you think of...cute things?" she asked them. "Kanji, is that you?"

Kanji gave out pained look. "Is it that obvious?" he asked them.

"You're the one who makes plushies in his spare time," Yosuke muttered.

"Well...I did like the replica of Tomoe you made. I still have it on my cell phone. Does that help?"

"It's probably the straightest answer we had all round," Yukiko replied, drawing hers. "Let's see...'What would you think of serving your customers origami napkins?'" She then looked at them before turning to Yu. "That's one of yours?"

Yu just gave her a blank stare. "I kind of thought it would make a nice addition," he said.

"That's probably because you're the only one that can pull it off," Yosuke replied. "And that makes..."

Considering they hadn't paid attention to Akira, the fact that he instantly changed back into his school uniform was quite jarring.

The last question was Akira's.

"'Which one of us would you prefer to have for a boyfriend?'" he read, STILL keeping the Falsetto voice. "Hmm...while Yosuke's got that adorable kicked puppy look and Kanji's got the manly/sensitive combo..."

"Kicked puppy?" Yosuke asked him. "I know that happens a lot to me, but do I really invoke that look in people?"

Kanji then face-palmed. "I didn't think of myself as a combo," he muttered.

"...I'm going with Yu-kun because he's father material."

This did not surprise any of them in the least. Not because of the father material, which was a boon due to mostly taking care of Nanako, but more along the lines of 'every girl tends to have the hots for Yu Narukami.'

"Did I just walk into something totally cringe-inducing again?" a voice asked them, revealing Ryuji. "Because I could have sworn I heard Akira say that he'd go for Narukami-Senpai because..."

And that's when Yukiko started on her hyena fits on how awkward it was.

"Please tell me you brought cold drinks," Yosuke said to Ryuji.

Ryuji nodded as he brought the cooler out, revealing drinks.

"Huh, they would go well with the food we ordered from Aika's," Chie replied.

Before Ryuji could ask, Aika appeared behind him, catching him by surprise.

"Your order's here," she said.

"Where did she come from!?!" Ryuji yelled.

"You can order at her restaurant from anywhere," Akira said, STILL using the falsetto voice. "Even inside a Palace, I'd wager."

Ryuji groaned. "Why is Boss acting like this?"

"Don't ask," Kanji muttered. "Just grab a bowl and sit down."

Ryuji nodded as he did so, sitting on another table entirely. "Just going to point out," he said, "interrogation by Makoto's older sister is less awkward than this."

And no one else came to the Cafe that day.

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
Debrief
Author: Edgar Fizzlewhip

"Akira, I owe you and Yosuke apologies. Your loop is much harder than it looks from the outside."

"Okay, that explains why you think you owe me one, but why Yosuke?"

"Morgana was replaced by a sleeping Teddie. I never knew you could make so many bad cat puns."

"Right."

"And, in retrospect, telling Sae that I was dating Makoto and had maxed out her social link was a mistake, but in my defense, I was heavily drugged by the police."

"Is that what we're calling it now? And no, telling Sae about dating Makoto never really turns out well."

"Still, on the plus side, I did get Rise's new album early and a promotional poster for it."

"That's it? That is the sum total of advice from my wise elder? His teammate is annoying and it's a bad idea to tell the prosecutor in charge of my case about banging her sister."

"What do you want from me? Dr. Takemi has nice legs?"

[Persona Q], [Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

"So, tell me," Akira muttered, "how is it that we can only use Four Personae?"

"It's what happens when we have three Wild Cards on our team," Minato replied. "Narukami and I had experienced something similar before your group Awakened...there are different traits we have that make them more efficient. Add the fact that the others can use Sub-Personas, and we've got one heck of a power creep on our side."

Yu nodded as they looked at the army of cards the Queen of Hearts had brought up. "And it seems like she has more than 52 cards in her deck this time," he said before looking at the black-clad male and the yellow female. "Zen, Rei, how are you two holding up?"

"We're fine, Narukami," Zen replied, Rei using a crossbow herself. "Although I did not expect her to have this many card soldiers the first time around. Can you clear them in one hit?"

Yu nodded. "Yosuke, tell the others to stand back," he said. "We're going to be releasing the triple Morning Stars."

"Ryuji, you heard him," Akira added.

"Mitsuru, stand back," Minato finished.

"I swear," Junpei muttered, knowing where this is going, "you guys synch faster with each other than you do the rest of us."

Mitsuru nodded. "You heard them," she said. "Everyone get back."

As they piled out of the room, Minato, Yu, and Akira had their Evoker, Tarot Card, and Masks ready.

"LUCIFER!" Minato yelled, blasting the evoker in his head.

"HELEL!" Yu yelled, breaking the star Tarot Card.

"SATANEL!" Akira yelled, the fire showing on his person.

At that moment, all three aspects of the Morning Star appeared with Satanel (being human-sized) leading the charge as fire, ice, and gunshots had riddled the area, destroying the Queen of Hearts.

Zen and Rei were the first to look at the carnage.

"That was your Ultimate Persona?" Rei asked Akira, who nodded. "He's scary."

"Yeah, but it's not often you use that guy as a symbol of hope," he said to the spirit.

Minato and Yu just stared at each other.

"Should we tell him?" the blue-haired male asked the guy.

"That he'll probably run into the guy in the main Amala timeline?" Yu replied, Minato nodding. "As soon as we get out of Wonderland."

"They're that powerful," Futuba replied. "And those aren't even their Ultimate Personae..."

"Remind me to never anger them," Ryuji said.

"I will admit," Yusuke replied, "seeing three different forms of that guy...it's rather inspiring. Does anyone have an easel?"

Ann gave Yusuke a blank stare. "You saw art," she muttered, "we saw absolute carnage."

"The sad part is," Yosuke said, "there's a lot more to this Branch than you think. Let's meet in the Velvet Room."

"Wait," Zen replied, looking at the three. "Is the box still intact?"

"Yeah," Minato replied. "You still need it?" Zen nodded. "Go ahead."

Zen and Rei walked over to said box, opening it to reveal her stuffed rabbit.

"You've grown," Zen said to Rei. "At first, you were terrified of learning the truth, but now...you're comfortable."

"I've had the chance to live, Zen," she replied. "And when I don't, I get the chance to make new friends and hang out with my old ones. It's nice to know that I can live my life and afterlife without regrets."

Zen gave out a smile. It was faint, but Rei knew that he had been developing emotions.

...

"So, you're telling us that our Branch is just a small part of a bigger one?" Haru asked them.

"One a lot more screwed up than ours," Shinjiro replied, the others seated with tables around the Velvet Room. "Seriously, compared to guys like YHVH and the White, we're more of a Quirky Town."

Makoto was a bit skeptical, but they knew more about this place than the others. "So," she muttered, "how is it that we've got the part with corrupt officials while you guys deal with the concept of Death and Illusions?"

"Because the world can change for better or worse," Naoto answered. "And by the time Namatame takes office, while he still keeps in contact with us, he's mostly out of Shidou's way due to Inaba being that far off."

Akira nodded as the listened intently to their seniors. "So, YHWH and the White," he muttered. "If they're as feared as you say, are there methods in taking them out?"

"For starters," Minato replied, knowing where this is going, "YHWH is powered by belief. From what I've heard from Flynn, one of the locals, you have to denounce his claims in order to weaken him, but he'll try to come back stronger as long as there is one person who believes in him." He then groaned. "The fact that I have Messiah as my ultimate Persona just adds to the irony."

"As for the White," Yu said, "it's usually best to take them out before they start their breaking speeches. They usually take the forms of loved ones and people you've bonded with, or in your case, Confidants, and they really don't like the fact that they're stuck in a Time Loop. I think Naoto said it best when they're nothing but children having tantrums."

Akira got the idea. "So, Yaldaboth on steroids for the first one," he muttered, "and a bunch of whiny kids who complain about things not going their way for the second."

"And even though Lucifer may be seen as a affable friend," a voice said, catching their attention as Igor had appeared on the chair, "he, too, must be treated with caution, Joker. He is not known as the Trickster without caution, as you are already aware of."

Morgana just gave Igor a look. "So, what are the odds that he'd make Akira his apprentice?" he asked his creator. Igor gave out a frown. "There's something else, isn't there?"

"One of the most common visitors I've had is Naoki Kashima, or as he's known in certain areas, the Demi-Fiend. That young man is the shining example of why the main Amala Branch was quite the crapsack world before the Edit, to the point where his own Shadow had forced him to rampage through Yggdrasil at one point."

That caused the Phantom Thieves of Hearts to freeze until they caught onto Igor's use of tenses.

"You said 'was,'" Yusuke muttered. "What happened?"

"Quite simple, young Fox. He moved on, aware of the futility of trying to restore his friends. While his road was rocky, there was nowhere to go but up. And as he walked the path of redemption, he found a new love, new friends, and forgiveness...even after a certain incident

which made him disillusioned to certain colorful people, he had managed to be civil with them."

Ryuji got the idea. "Yeah," he muttered, "I'm starting to see why there's a problem. Must have been hell on Earth if he was dealing with that much crap in his life."

"It's not a pretty place," Zen confirmed.

The gloom within the Velvet Room had continued for a bit as the newcomers pondered about what would happen if they were in that part of the branch. The only sounds were of Yu writing numbers on the multitude of chopsticks.

"You trying to lighten the mood, Senpai?" Kanji asked them.

"Kind of," Yu replied. "Why?"

"Because I'm pretty sure that there's a festival going on, and you're implying that the King's Game should lighten the mood."

That caught Morgana's attention. "King's Game?" he asked them. "Wait...does it have anything to do with the mock swordfight Yu and Akira had?"

"Oh yeah," Ryuji muttered. "I don't think Naoto was Awake at the time. Still, if it helps lighten the mood, I'm in."

Yosuke groaned. "I think you're going to regret saying that, Ryuji," he muttered.

Miscellaneous 17

[Persona 2]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

"This is not going to work," Jun muttered, looking at the swarm of Nazis in anti-Personae machinery.

Lisa just gave him a glare. "The rumors about the glaring weakness of the Last Battalion are spread," she muttered. "We've only got one shot at this."

Eikichi gave out a blank stare. "Yes, but THIS!?!" he asked them, looking at the paper. "There's a line between refuge in audacity and suicidal overconfidence. Right now, we're crossing said line."

"Quiet," Tatsuya muttered. "I really don't want you guys to get shot again because we're too loud." He then looked at Maya. "Your call, Maya."

Maya nodded as they heard an explosion. "On the count of three," she muttered. "One...two...THREE!"

They all dashed out, much to the surprise of the German-speaking mecha drivers. Once they brought out the sheets of paper, they decided to make their battle cry...in German...

"*Wenn ist das Nunstück git und Slotermeyer? Ja! Beiherhund das Oder die Flipperwaldt gersput!*"

It was at that moment that the machines stopped completely. For a moment, everything was silent...until laughter was heard as piles of the Last Battalion had popped out of said armor, stopping the army in their tracks.

Jun just stared in disbelief. "Well," he muttered. "I don't know if he's going to be amused or utterly angry."

"Knowing how he works," Tatsuya said, "amused. Stay frosty because that's the first wave. The next one's coming up."

The others nodded as they continued to make the joke, more of the Last Battalion falling in their wake. It wasn't a smooth run to prevent Maya's death, but it was a step up from Baseline in that they can literally make their enemies die from laughter.

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
Royal Straight – part 2
Author: Solaris Requiem

"...And that concludes my initial investigation, #1," Naoto reported into her custom phone, designed with heavy-duty security and an encrypted connection. The line remained silent before sigh came through the phone's speaker.

"I see... I had my suspicions about the Phantom Thieves of Heart previously after the media reports. It is good to get your informed opinion about this, #6. Am I correct in assuming that you have made possible contact with a potential Wild Card?"

"Yes, a boy by the name of Akira Kurusu. After I gave him my card I gave him a few Revival Beads. If he recognizes what they are, then he will likely be discussing with the rest of the Phantom Thieves and they will contact me soon enough. But regardless, I would appreciate if you look into his record for me..."

"Beg your pardon?" the person on the other side of the line answered. Naoto frowned, "If he's anything like Narukami-Senpai then it's highly unlikely he would end up assaulting someone. I took the liberty at looking at his criminal record as well and to say that it is dubious is an understatement. I would appreciate it if you had some of your specialists look over it."

"I'll see what I can do about it," the other voice said. "Keep me updated in the meantime. Shadows and Persona Users go hand in hand. When there is one, there is definitely the other."

"Understood." The connection cut out as the conversation was scrubbed from the phone's memory. Naoto sighed as she loosened her tie and shirt, relaxing in her private apartment that was rented out thanks to the Kirijo Foundation inside of the Tokyo area.

"Ah, it's been a while since I was able to have a good mystery to solve. It's pretty exciting," the female Looper replied as she reclined in her seat. She glanced out of the window at the bright city lights and sighed before she locked away her company phone inside of her safe. She pulled out her personal cellphone, light blue with a cute keychain of Teddie and her Persona Yamato Sumeragi (courtesy of Kanji) and flipped it open. She dialed in a number and held it to her ear.

"Hiya Naoto-kun!" a cheery voice called. "How's Tokyo treating you?"

"It's pretty busy but charming in its own way," Naoto replied. "Although I do miss the peace and quiet from Inaba. How is your new project treating you, Rise-san?"

"It's going great! The normal new-expansion novelty hasn't worn off for me just yet so I'm really enjoying my time here so far! I'm planning on starting on a world tour this summer. The first stop is in Tokyo during the summer. You interested in a ticket? I'll throw in the normal backstage pass and everything if you're interested."

"Hmm... A concert in Tokyo, huh?" Naoto looked contemplative before an idea came to her. "Actually Rise-san. I would like to get your opinion on something."

...

"So let me get this straight," Ryuji began as he and the other Phantom Thieves as they discussed the message and the items that Naoto had given Akira. "So... while the two of us

are gone she walked up to you because you reminded her of an old friend, and then you got her number?! You lucky bastard."

"You're focusing on the wrong thing entirely Ryuji," Morgana sighed. Ann rolled her eyes at her friend's antics while Yusuke was examining the business card with the scrutiny that only an artist was able to do. "What is important is that Lady Naoto, somehow, got her hands on Revival Beads; an item that you only get in Palaces or from Mementos."

"Which means that she has to be able to go into Palaces themselves... Could she be the 'person in the black mask' that Madarame was talking about earlier?" Ann proposed. Morgana nodded.

"That is one possibility Lady Ann... But if that is the case, why would she contact Akira openly, giving him valuable items that would help him?" the cat replied. "Wouldn't it have been better for her to not reveal her presence and to work from the shadows? The fact that she bothered to make contact with us so openly and brazenly... it must mean that she has some kind of ulterior motive."

"Indeed," Yusuke spoke. "This card tells us all that we need to know about her." The artist held up the navy business card that Naoto had given Akira. The Wild Card couldn't help but feel that he had that particular shade of blue somewhere before...

"Wait, really? Is this some kind of 'artist thing' that none of us can understand." Ryuji asked.

"Not precisely, but take a closer look," Yusuke laid the card down on the table. "Note the way the way that the 'a' in Naoto and Shirogane differ. Normally business cards are printed using machines. But as you can see in her letters and numbers there is slight variations between the two, in addition to shallow indentation marks into the card itself."

"What... does this have to do with anything about Naoto?" Ann asked. It was clear that the rest of the Phantom Thieves were lost at Yusuke's tangent.

"It means that this card is hand-made. Like the strokes of a brush, or rather fountain-pen in this particular case, one can determine the author's personality from it. The way that they think and how they thought when they wrote the card."

Akira and the others seemed to be confused as Yusuke continued on this weird tangent. "The handwriting is neat and precise. It is almost like Japanese Calligraphy applied to Eastern and Western alphabets. This kind of skill... it takes countless years to even write a single letter with this much precision. It has the perfect balance and spacing and legibility. It is stylized enough to create its own identity and style, but it is still obvious what letter is being shown. Even my own calligraphy teacher, who had studied the art his entire life, would not be able to replicate something like this."

"I-I see..." Morgana replied as he began to piece Yusuke's thought process together. Akira, on the other hand, was easily able to do so given his experience with the resets.

"So you're saying that Naoto is dangerous and we should be cautious around her," he clarified. Ann and Ryuji looked at him in astonishment while Yusuke seemed pleased that

Akira had understood him.

"Indeed. She clearly has experience with all sorts of matters. It would be best to exercise the utmost caution and suspicion when dealing with her in any way, shape, or form. If she contacted you in this matter, it is clear that she purposefully did so with a plan in mind."

"You got all of that from her handwriting?" Ryuji gaped. "Seriously? That's something straight out of TV show!"

Yusuke puffed. "I am an artist. It's child's play to discern a person's personality and thought process through their work."

"Alright then, with that in mind," Morgana began. "Are we all in agreement to establish contact with Naoto Shirogane?"

"Yep, it would be good to do so. I mean, she was praising us at the TV Show so that has to count for something!" Ryuji cheered.

Ann nodded, "It would be nice to have another girl to talk to. There's way too much testosterone right now."

"I'm in favor as well," Yusuke said. "As an Ace Detective she could be a useful contact that would provide us with information."

"So then it's unanimous!" Morgana grinned. "Joker and I will make contact with Naoto later today. Let's call this meeting adjourned! Now for the fun part..." Morgana and the others stared at Akira suddenly with a hungry gleam in their eyes.

Akira looked at their hungry expressions and sighed the sigh of the damned. "Fine. I'll make some curry and coffee..."

"And sushi!" Morgana added with a toothy grin. "I know you've got thirty million yen in your back account. What better way to spend money than on friends?"

Akira rolled his eyes good-naturedly at his feline friend. No matter how many times that Morgana and him had done these resets their bond with each other got tighter and tighter.

"Wait, what?! Akira has HOW much money?" Ryuji gaped. Ann and Yusuke looked at him in shock. "How are you so damn loaded?! I mean, yeah we make a lot of money from our Phantom Thieves gig but still?! How did you get 30 million yen?!"

Akira and Morgana shared a knowing look before the human grinned impishly. "That's for me to know and you not to."

…

A few days later:

“It’s showtime, Joker,” Morgana replied as he accompanied Akira to their chosen meeting spot. It was in front of an apartment on the outskirts of Tokyo. “This didn’t happen the last

few resets, so make sure to stay on your guard," he cautioned. "For all we know this could be a trap."

Akira nodded as he looked upwards. He had carried around his knife, Paradise Lost, in its sheath to be drawn if needed. The apartment was high-class and opulent; it was clear that only the wealthy would be able even afford to spend a single night there.

"Thank you for meeting with me," a voice called. Akira and Morgana looked up to see Naoto, dressed in a casual clothing along with her signature blue cap perched upon her head. She looked at Akira with piercing eyes, one that made the Phantom Thief wary immediately. The detective sighed, "It appears you have questions that you would like answered. And it also appears that I made a social faux-pas with those beads I gave you. My apologies, I did not mean to alarm you that much."

"Too little too late," Akira rolled his eyes. "What do you want with me?"

"Nothing more than to make contact with you and to discuss some matters," Naoto sighed. "Although since you know what I gave you, that makes things much more… complicated. The information that I wish to discuss with you is best told in a location where nobody else can overhear us." Naoto looked pointedly at Akira. "Would you happen to know of such a place?"

"She can't be-" Morgana hissed. "Hold on Akira, this might be a good way to check if she's really the culprit. Ask to see her phone!"

Naoto frowned as she overheard Morgana's voice. "Oh, you brought your cat with you… May I pet him?" she asked.

"Perfect!" Morgana grinned. "Ask for her phone while she pets me." Akira nodded.

"I'll let you hold him if I can see your phone for a bit." Akira offered. "It's just to test something."

Naoto frowned, confused about the sudden request, before she pulled out her cellphone. There were a couple keychains attached to it, both of which looked very intricate and expensive. She unlocked the phone quickly before she handed it to Akira. Morgana in the meanwhile jumped out of Akira's bag and walked up to Naoto.

Naoto smiled as she leaned down and pet Morgana, scratching and rubbing behind his ears deftly, causing the cat to purr appreciatively.

"Wow… her technique's out of this world…" the cat sighed as he leaned into the scritches. Akira sighed as he watched Morgana become completely tamed by the detective's efforts. In the meanwhile, Akira quickly scanned through the apps on the phone. It took a bit of effort since the phone was WAY more advanced than anything he had seen before but it seemed that Naoto did not have the Meta-Nav in any way, shape or form.

When he looked up from the phone he bore witness to Morgana reclining in Naoto's arms, his eyelids half closed with an almost drunk expression as he purred constantly.

Akira rolled his eyes good-naturedly before he locked the phone. It appeared that Naoto hadn't entered the Metaverse just yet but he would remain cautious… The Wild Card grinned mischievously as he pulled out his own phone and sneakily snapped a few pics of Morgana being pet into submission by Naoto. It would be perfect material to show the rest of the Phantom Thieves later.

"Alright, I'm done," Akira called out, making Morgana snap out of his pet-drunk stupor. He reluctantly left Naoto's arms as Akira handed her phone back to the detective.

Morgana sighed, obviously missing Naoto's petting efforts. "I wish you took longer to check her phone… But regardless, did you find anything?" he asked Akira.

The boy shook her head. "Nothing on her phone. We can trust her… tentatively."

Naoto raised an eyebrow, "Ah, it appears that the two of you can communicate with each other… interesting," the detective mused. "Well, do I have your trust now that you've seen my phone?"

"For now," Akira shrugged as he pulled out his own phone, "If you would follow me, Detective." He booted the Meta-Nav as he and Morgana led Naoto towards the subway entrance as space distorted and heaved.

[Persona 5], [Jurassic World]
Dinosaur Eden – parts 3 and 4
Author: GarnettFoxy

Roxanne froze as they reached the midpoint of the Palace, her eyes slits and frame tense.

"Roxanne?" She growled lowly.

"Wu." She nimbly climbed up a tree hiding in the neon leaves, taking that a cue the Theives ducked into cover just in time as a quartet of Shadows lumbled past, reclinging in a Pagoda on their backs was what could only be Wu's Shadow. He was more or less unchanged then his normal self physically, though he was wearing a crown of vines and his labcoat was heavily jeweled and embroidered with gold.

A larger shadow limped up to him and bowed his head.

"All-knowing one the final preparations are in place, in two weeks the world will finally see your master piece for the glory that it is."

"Finally, I won't languish in the shadows of Men with no worth other then their money." Shadow Wu laughed "My King will bring about a new age!" The shadow bowed once more to Wu and allowed the four carrying him to move on. As soon as the coast was clear Roxy jumped down and started swearing.

"Fuck Fuck! The bastard's already made the fucker! Shit!" The raptor paced back and forth grumbling.

"Two weeks, Lady Hammond are there any events taking place then?" Morgana questioned, Roxanne frowned thinking

"...No, I mean the only events I can think of that would jump start the I-Rexes creation would be Dad's death which happened years ago, and Hoskins and he's already been a part of the park for months so it can't been him arriving...." She scratched at her neck scars "I may have little influence on the park but if military contacts or investors to the park where coming I'd be the first to know about it months in advance....Two weeks.....Fuck!" She yelped "Two weeks is the average incubation time for a T-rex which being the primary source of DNA for the I-Rex...."

"Wait this is a good thing!" Ryuji grinned "We don't even need to steal his heart, you can get into where they keep the eggs and smash it." Roxanne sighed.

"Can't. I have access to the hatchery yes but as a new species the I-Rex eggs won't BE in the hatchery, the first eggs of every new species re-created on the island is always hatched in the DNA labs under constant supervision."

"So we're back to square one of stealing Wu's heart." Akira nodded "Very well then do you feel up to continuing on, or should we go back for the day?"

...

In the dead of night the camera's flicked off in the Innovation Center, Roxy back to being human casually strolled up to the statue of John Hammond and smiled.
"Hey dad, can't wait to tell you about this one next loop, I think you'll like the Thieves their good people." She sighed pulling out a lighter.

"...Sorry about this." She knelt by the statue and flicked the lighter on carefully holding the flame to the back of the amber of the cane held in the statue's grasp where it wasn't likely to be seen.

Her eyes flashed gold and she snarled as a small patch of the 'Amber' melted and the stink of burning plastic hit her nose "You complete and utter bastard..."

...

"How's the card coming?" Ryuji asked as Roxanne sat down at their table at Nobu. Roxanne snagged a peice of fish from Morgana's plate rolling her eyes at his annoyed hiss.

"You are getting free all you can eat at every restaurant, you can share. And it'd finished, just waiting for one last detail." She reached under the chair pulling out a bag that she had in her subspace. Not a minute later a scrawny guy with messy hair and glasses eschew got in the seat next to her looking around.

"Swanky, I don't think I've ever even been near this place before. Anyway you-"

Roxanne handed over the bag "Three original Park t-shirts and the entire Carnegie Collection. You got your side of the bargain done Lowery?" Lowery looked in awe as he took and bag

and peered in.

"Holy crap you did...." He carefully put the bag down and pulled out an i-pad turning it so the group could see the unmistakable image of Wu (Sans the adornments of his Shadow self) working at a computer "Three, two and one."

The screen went black and a shockwave seemed to go through the crowd outside as every screen in Jurassic World showed the Logo of the Phantom Thieves and scrawling text.

Sir Henry Wu, the self aggrandizing sinner of Pride.
You have defiled the ideals that have raised you up and have committed an unholy crime against nature.
You have endangered the lives of countless people to feed your bloated pride and ego.
We have decided to make you confess your crimes with your own mouth.
We will take your distorted desires without fail.
Expect us,
The Phantom Thieves

Lowery took back the pad quickly tapping away on it "And that's Claire demanding to know what that was and-Opps, all data relating to that message was just lost. Lets try, oh no, they got to the security feeds deleting random patches going back a year, who knows what was relevant when?" Lowery smirked getting up bag under one arm. "I was never here."

They watched him go Roxanne sipping a drink "Don't worry Lowery's the most trustworthy guy I know in the Park, he'll never rat us out."

"Oh?" Akira arched an eyebrow.

"The dude was threatened to evacuate the park by armed guards in Baseline when the Indominus started it's slaughter. He refused to leave till after it was dead and he was sure everyone else was out of the park. He seems a coward at first glance but really he's a dependable guy, especially if you play into his love of collectible dinosaurs."

[Persona 5], [DC Comics]
(no title)
Author: BloodBottler

The Phantom Thieves had seen quite a few palaces in their time. They had seen such strange and surreal sights in the Metaverse that they thought there could be nothing that would even phase them. After all, when you've seen a creepy sex castle, a weird museum, a floating bank and even a spaceport based on fast food there really should be nothing that really could shake you.

Until their current target.

"What…is this?" Yusuke said, trying to comprehend the room they were in.

"Calendars? Hundreds of them it looks like." Ryuji said.

Calendars lined the walls, the floor, and there were even some on the ceiling. Piles of them were messily strewn about in every corner of the room. They all were of different dates and years from what they could see.

They all had huge red "Xs" marked on each day, and seemed to have random scribbles on them. Haru picked up the nearest one and red aloud.

"'June 14th, it prevented a dam bursting. Does its arrogance know no bounds? It would defy the very nature of the planet itself.' What on earth does it all mean?"

"Hmm, I'll bet I know when the earliest one of these was." Makoto said.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Ryuji asked.

"It's the day HE showed up, right?" Futaba said.

Makoto nodded her head. "This is a room showing every day he's been here."

"Jeez," Ryuji whistled and rubbed the back of his head, "How much of an ass do you have to be to hate…"

"DON'T SAY HIS NAME!" Ann shouted. Ryuji nearly hit the roof he was so shocked.

"Hey, I wasn't going to!" He shouted back.

"Just be careful Skull," Akira said, "Last time we said his name every Shadow in this place was on us."

The group collectively shuddered as they remembered.

"I think we should get out of here," Futaba said, "There's nothing here for us."

"I agree, let's move out team." Akira said, his trenchcoat fluttering as he ran deeper into the Palace.

…

After fighting numerous shadows they managed to come across another big room. This room was just as disturbing as the one with calendars. The group knew that the "Hall of Heroes" for this person couldn't be a good thing. What they saw in there shocked them even more than the last room. Huge golden statues lined the hall, towering above the Phantom Thieves. However, some of the statues could hardly be called heroes.

"Attila the Hun, Al Capone, Adolf Hitler…" Ann read aloud, "Man this guy is messed up."

"Hey! He's even got Captain Kidd here!" Ryuji shouted, clenching his fist, "Now it's effin personal you shitbag!"

"Guys, look at this!" Haru shouted from the other end of the corridor.

At the end of the hallway was a statue much larger than the others. It was of a beautiful man with giant bat wings, with his back to what looked like a cliffside. He wore ornate armour and seemed to have a pained expression on his face. When the group got close to the stature Yusuke's eyes widened.

"I knew it, it's Doré's 'Depiction of Satan'!" he exclaimed.

"Wait, you know this statue Yusuke?" Akira asked.

"Well it isn't a statue in our world," Yusuke explained, his eyes still transfixed on the statue. "It's a drawing, it seems the ruler of this palace must identify with Satan in some way. Perhaps he sees himself as a rebel going against an all-powerful adversary."

"It'd make sense considering who we're talking about." Makoto said, "And why he'd consider this city to be 'Hell'"

"Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." Yusuke spat each word like they were acid "And this man was once President?"

"He's a piece of work that's for sure," Morgana said, "But we haven't got time for this, the treasure's just up ahead."

The group needed no signal to move out. All the Phantom Thieves moved to the next room as one, preparing themselves for whatever would come.

...

Indeed, this last room was possibly the most disturbing of all. It was a great church, with sombre organ music being broadcast from some unknown place. It was huge, Akira remembered reading about the Vatican in Rome, and this place looked like a twisted version of that. There were paintings everywhere depicting the "virtue" of the Palace's ruler. But that wasn't the most disturbing part of it all.

"Oh…oh god.!" Haru put her hand over her mouth as her eyes widened with shock.

"This…this is terrible." Yusuke said.

"Who would do this?" Makoto said.

The rest of the group were silent, but their silence said more than enough.

Around the room were people in various torture devices. Some seemed to be stretched beyond the human bodies limits on a rack, others were being burned at the stake, one was encased in concrete, some seemed to be forced to run in a giant wheel just out of reach of food and water while spikes skewered their backs, others were trapped in yellow iron maidens, another had his entire body replaced with junk and useless metal scraps, and one (who seemed to have an entire shrine dedicated to him) was strung up and forced to watch this horrid display. There were others, but the Thieves didn't want to see any more of this, and they made their way to the alter at the end of the chapel.

There was the treasure, or at least the shimmering shadow that would be the treasure, on the alter. Behind the alter there were glowing green spikes, and on these spikes, was a man. He groaned in agony as the Phantom Thieves approached, and barely acknowledged their presence. The entire group was silent as they looked up at the man and then at the treasure. There was silence for a few minutes (save for the moaning and screaming of the captors) and then Morgana took a deep breath.

“We’ve secured a route to the treasure,” he said, “We need to send him the calling card and prepare for tomorrow.”

The entire group nodded their heads and turned to leave the chapel. They all agreed afterward that they were more than happy to leave that place without exploring any further.

…

The young man shook as he held the little card in his hand. He looked at the desk in front of him and tried to ignore the fact that he was up so high and that a fall from this building would surely kill him. His hands shook as he walked towards the desk. He tried to speak but only pathetic whine came out. He wiped the sweat from his brow and tried again. The chair behind the desk moved slightly, causing him to squeak with fright.

“Just leave it on my desk.” Said a voice from the other side of the chair. Commanding, deep, and threatening, it was a voice the young man had come to fear. “And get out of here before I ask you your name.”

The young man quickly put the card on the desk and ran out of the room as fast as he could. There was then silence in the room, only the sounds of the city outside could be heard. Then, slowly, the chair turned and a hand grabbed the card. It read:

Lex Luthor, you are guilty of the sin of Pride.
You consider this city to be yours, and you use the people for your own gain.
You slander and try and destroy a good man who helps all of humanity
In your arrogance, you have brought misery to so many people time and time again.
We will take your distorted desires
Expect us
The Phantom Thieves.

…

Lex crushed the card in his hand. Those damn brats, so now they decide to target him, do they? Do they not realise he was working for the good of all mankind? That he was the last hope if humanity was ever supposed to survive? He’d show them, he’d analyse this card and track down those brats and….no. Let them come. Lex Luthor’s heart is not so weak that a few self-righteous vigilantes could ever hope to change it. The alien had tried time and time again but he saw through all his wicked tricks. He would show the word he was truly their superior. He stood up and looked over the city. His city.

“Let me show you Phantom Thieves, no matter how much you claim to know, Lex Luthor is always the superior one.”

…

Inside Lex’s Palace, the Shadow Lex observed his kingdom as well. He looked over the hellscape and flapped his great batwings to take him even higher. He grinned sinisterly and thumped his fist against his ornate armor.

“Phantom Thieves! I will destroy you!” He shouted, so loudly it sounded through the whole city, “You accuse me of pride, of arrogance, but how much arrogance does it take to face down a man who has taken of a
God, and lives? Come, and seal your doom!”

Security Level: 99%

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

"Oh, it's you!"

Akira looked up to see Goro Akechi approach. He had tried various approaches to dealing with the detective, such as stalking him and capturing him next time he entered the metaverse, befriending him, disposing of him. Morgana and the rest of the phantom thieves were pretty ashamed of him that loop, so he hadn't done that again. His most common and most effective method was stealing his phone. This time, he wanted to try something else. His mouth curled into a catlike grin as he shouted, "Hey, Pancake boy, what's up?!"

Akechi tripped mid step, barely catching himself. "P-pancake boy?"

Akira would treasure that baffled look on his face for a long time.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Persona 5], [Pokémon]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

Ghestis was confused. "But how?" he asked them. "The White Orb should have activated under him!"

N knew this song and dance before. Ghestis had attempted to grab an orb that represented either Truth or Ideals, they did the ritual, and once the battle was over, he was going to attempt to take them out for a mad grab involving every single Pokemon in the world, which may or may not include Ultra Beasts.

But when he noticed the White Orb did not react to his presence, he wondered...did they grab the wrong orb?

"It was not easy getting up here," a voice replied, catching them off-guard. "Yet despite the horde of Pokemon and me running out of repellent, I managed to arrive."

'Yes,' N thought, 'we have the wrong orb.' He then looked to see a grey-haired male in a high school uniform with Pokeballs on his waist.

Ghestis growled. "You," he muttered. "It seems like the orb was a fake. No matter. I shall unleash my Hydregion and start my plans early..."

"It was not a fake," N said, catching them off-guard. "Take a look at the orb."

Indeed, the orb was reacting as it floated towards the newcomer, changing into Reshiram, the Dragon of Truth.

However, instead of the blue eyes it was known for, the eyes turned yellow as it smirked.

"Yu Narukami," it said. "The Hero of Truth. Fitting, considering what we've endured for an eternity."

The voice was gruff, but that was expected for a dragon.

Yu smirked. "So that's why I couldn't summon you when I Woke Up," he said. "Although, I expected you to be Zekrom."

"Yes, his lightning abilities does suit my style. Fire was more Orpheus's thing." He then glared at Ghestis. "But for the time being, I'll take what I can get when it comes to the company of outright liars."

"First thing's first." Yu then tossed the Black Orb to N, it glowing in his presence much to Ghestis's shock. "You familiar with Zekrom's abilities?"

"I was forced to study about them through the Pokemon I was raised with," N replied. 'Not to mention that I've partnered with Zekrom enough times to know how he works.' "And it looks like Father here was planning on stabbing us in the back."

Yu gave him a stare. "What is he, a corrupt politician?"

"More of a hypocritical cultist."

And that's when Zekrom had unleashed itself.

"FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, I LAY DORMANT!" it yelled, in a familiar voice. "AND NOW I'VE COME TO..." He then noticed Yu Narukami. "Oh, hey, Narukami. Izanagi."

"Ryoji," both Izanagi and Yu replied.

Ryoji then looked at himself. "Huh, a Thunder Dragon? I'm more of a Dark Type, although I lean towards Fire due to spawning from Orpheus that one time."

"Get used to it," Izanagi replied. "N, this is Ryoji Mikazuchi. Ryoji, N."

"Nice to meet you," N said.

"Likewise," Zekrom said, showing blue eyes before looking at Ghestis. "Now, what's the deal with this guy?"

Ghestis was flabbergasted before tapping the cane. "I had no idea my plans would be derailed this much," he muttered. "But I have no choice. Release Kyurem."

And that's when a blimp had shown up, revealing an ice dragon...that did not look amused. At all.

"How the hell did I Wake Up like this?" the Ice Dragon yelled, catching the madman by surprise. "One minute, I was in a crater, and now, I'm chained to a blimp! And to top it off, I'm not used to being this big!"

"Hang on, Akira!" Yu yelled. "We're on our way!"

Ryoji groaned. "Uh, Double Weakness to Dragon?" he asked him. "Have you not played the games."

N just hopped on Ryoji. "I've learned to take the Type Chart as a guideline," he said. "Now let's go!"

Ghestis glared at them. "Hydregion, Frustration," he said, releasing a three-headed black and purple dragon that was extremely angry. Due to how much Ghestis was an asshole, the attack multiplied as it headed towards them...unaware that the Reshiram turned into a stuffed animal.

"Sorry we're late, Partner," a voice said, revealing an orange Greninja. "We had to call for help."

"Indeed," a female voice added, revealing an Aegislash that had stunned it with Sacred Sword. "Although...Ryoji, is Minato still in there?"

Ryoji chuckled. "Oh, he is," he said. "He lost the coin toss on who got to say the speech after being released from our onyx prison."

N looked at Yu, who gave him a look.

"In my defense," he said, "the only ones who didn't wake up as Pokemon were Dojima and Nanako, and I'm pretty sure that the Shadow Operatives were with you. Like Aegis the Aegislash."

"Close Range Combat is Labrys's department," Aegis replied, as she landed next to the Greninja. "Yosuke."

"Aegis," Yosuke said as more Pokemon had appeared. Two sprays of water had turned into familiar Kunai on his end. "We'll take these clowns out. You guys get to Akira."

N nodded as he looked at the blimp.

Ghestis growled. "Don't just stand there," he said. "STOP THEM!"

As Team Plasma had aimed at the Heroes, one of them found themselves frozen in ice by a Frosslass with a rapier.

"What?" Ghestis yelled before he got punched out by an Elecvire with a skull tattoo on his arm. "Ow...you miserable Pokemon, I will make sure you end up..."

"Oh, you're going to be prebeared for trouble," an Beartic said, catching him off-guard.

"And from what you're going to be feeling," a Liepard finished, "let's make it double."

"Please don't encourage him," a Mienshao replied, face-palming.

This was going to be one heck of a battle as more Pokemon had gathered.

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Persona 5], [Shokugeki No Soma]
(no title)
Author: EchoGarrote

“There’s nothing wrong with us, or what we make!” Megumi Tadokoro snapped at the golden eyed version of Erina Nakiri. “Even a cheese sandwich has more taste than ANYTHING your dolls make! Nothing made from here makes ANYONE happy! I WILL MAKE WHATEVER I WANT!”

Here I thought you’d never been listening.

That’s when Megumi screamed.

The other members of Polaris at first backed away in shock as the young girl clamped her hands to her head. Her eyes wide, and shrieked in agony, tears coming from her eyes and spittle foaming at the corners of her mouth.

Are you ready to bring something into the world? To breathe life into dull clay?

Ryoko and Yuuki ran up to her, but the Police Officer, Featherman, and Phantom Thief pushed them aside, and stood around the girl in a protective triangle. Their faces going from shock, to horror, to awe, to joy and excitement, and back.

“Come on, kid!” Officer Satonaka said.

Megumi clutched her hands to her chest and there was a haze of black smoke, when she pulled them away, there was a glowing ring, sunk into her chest, and everyone instantly knew that it was encircling her heart.

Are you willing to show the world your works, and expose your Heart?

“Yes.” Megumi said. The other three persona users couldn’t help but feel elated, as they saw the girl put a hand around the ring, and grip tight. “I’ll show them Me.”

I am Thou, Thou art I

Show this world what comes from a creation of love. Beholden to none but your muse!

“COME!” Megumi said as she ripped the ring out of her chest and held a sphere of blue blazing fire. “GALATEA!”

Everyone stared as a figure appeared behind Megumi. It looked like a clay mannequin. Female, with long flowing blond hair. It’s limbs were not attached to the torso, but hanging free, connected by what looked like flames. In the center of the figure’s featureless chest, was a hollow in the shape of a heart, through it everyone could see the flames within. Her facial features were carved into the clay, unmoving, but holding a look of warmth and kindness, but also an unquestioning strength.

“What?” The Shadow Erina said. “You DARE sully MY stage with THIS?” The words were aggressive, but everyone could see the fear clearly on the ‘dance instructor’s’ face. “Seize her!” She shrieked.

“Burn!” Megumi said, and thrust out her hand holding the blue sphere of fire.

“Incoming Agi!” Haru said.

“Get clear!” Yukari shouted, as the three veteran persona users jumped out of the way.

Fire exploded over the clockwork dancers, and they spasmed and staggered.

“Alright, kid!” Chie said, as the three girls took positions at Megumi’s sides. “Let’s see what you can do! Everyone else! We’ll draw them off, you all make for the mirror portal and don’t stop running until you’re back in reality! GO!”

[Persona 5], [Jurassic World]
Dinosaur Eden – part 5
Authors: GarnettFoxy, Solaris Requiem

Roxanne sighed carefully turning over the cane in her claws (And keeping it out of Morgana's eager reach as she did so) "He loved him, you know... Wu was practically his own son, much as I hate what he does. But despite all of that he still-"

A shadow charged out of the bushes, catching Roxanne unaware. The raptor was sent flying into a tree, crashing into it with a heavy thud as the cane clattered out of her grasp. It rolled on the ground for a good few seconds until it met the feet of Shadow Wu.

"I believe this belongs to me," the shadow chuckled as he picked up the Treasure, its amber ornament glimmering in the distorted light of the Palace. "It’s hard to believe that if it wasn't for this insignificant insect I wouldn't be here... If Hammond hadn't extracted the first building blocks of this park then I wouldn't have become a God among men."

"You ain't no god!" Ryuji snapped "You're just a self centered prick who's selling himself out and putting thousands of people in danger just to make a few bucks!"

"Sacrifices must be made in the name of Progress!" Shadow Wu sneered, "Nobody cares how many lab animals are slaughtered in order to make medicine. What's so different here?" he laughed scornfully as he looked at the Phantom Thieves and Roxanne. "People want results! They want entertainment! And that's what I'm giving them! It's not my fault if they want to throw their lives away to get up close and personal with danger!"

"Entertainment?" Ann scoffed, "You're just making excuses for yourself. Nobody wants to die. They have families and friends that care about them. Their lives are important, and you have no right to dictate that they die just so you can make your weapon!"

"Do you think John Hammond would be proud of you twisting his dream?" Roxanne hissed picking herself up, "That he would approve of you playing God? He wanted the park to be a thing of wonder: a place to humble humanity and show them the majesty of the ancient world. Do you think he'd be proud of you selling his dream to the military? Of turning wonder into terror and fear? You're no God Wu, you're just a pathetic child."

Shadow Wu growled gripping the cane hard enough to make the bamboo creak, "You think you can talk to me like that? Pathetic worms like you deserve extinction!" Shadow Wu hunched over, groaning in what sounded like pain. His form began to grow as the groans turned into growls and then frenzied roars, the golden crown of thorns was ripped apart from a pair of horns growing from his elongating skull, lab coat shredded by hardened golden scales and white armored plating.

"Is that the Indominus?" Morgana asked worried as Shadow Wu's claws gouged into the earth. The monster snarled and howled in triumph, its eyes brimming with bloodlust and pure hatred.

"Good news, that is not the Indominus..." Roxanne began as she got up, "Bad news that is the Ultimasaurus, even though the color's off. It doesn't have the camouflage ability and intelligence of the Indominus, but it's even more uncontrollable and harder to kill then the Indominus... God I hate the Chaos effect," the Looper growled tense and ready to pounce.

Akira grinned as he and the rest of the Phantom Thieves readied themselves as well before the young boy walked up towards where Roxanne was with a slow and deliberate gait. The white mask on his face burned azure as a pillar of flame rose.

Arsene, with his black mask and onyx wings, laughed in challenge at the abomination before Roxanne and Akira. Cursed power danced and swelled around the demonic thief in stark contrast to the twisted 'heavenly' appearance of the Shadow Wu's saurian form. The other Personas of the Phantom Thieves: Seiten Taisei, Mercurius and Hectate stood ready to fight.

"You ready to do this?" the Wild Card asked with a confident grin on his face.

"Damn straight I am!" she snarled as the battle began.

With an almost careless flap of his wings Arsene conjured a powerful Eigaon, launching the assault of flurry of crimson light towards his foe. Shadow Wu shrieked as the cursed magic pounded and pierced through his scales. His ruby eyes burned with hatred as he charged Joker, intent on skewering the human on his horns. The human sidestepped the assault,

turning what would have been an impaling strike into one that only caught the side of his coat. He brought up his gun, grinning before he pulled the trigger, nailing the creature with several well-aimed shots that rattled and impacted between the gaps of Wu's armored plating. But despite the Wild Card's precise aim, it did not do nearly as much damage as expected.

Akira frowned, "Curse magic is neutral. Gun's aren't going to cut it though," he reported to the rest of the team. "You know the drill everyone!"

Incensed by its failure to make the leader of the Phantom Thieves a chew toy, Shadow Wu roared, making eardrums ache and the air rattle.

"SHUT THE FUCK UP ALREADY!" Ryuji snarled as he called his Persona, Seiten Taisei, forth. "Eat Ziodyne, you overgrown lizard!"

The Persona raised its spiked staff and called forth a mighty pillar of lighting upon the creature, electrocuting it with its might and power. The Shadow growled, shaking its head and turning its hateful gaze towards Ryuji. "Lightning ain't doing jack!" he called as his Persona opted for another option. The brightly colored persona slammed its staff against the creature, crunching bone and scale as it was batted away. The Ultimasaurus growled as it staggered to its feet, baring its oversized teeth that dripped with saliva. "It's neutral to physical damage!" Ryuji shouted with a grin on his face, "That's a freaking relief."

As the Shadow Dinosaur managed to regain his footing after that hefty assault, Roxanne latched onto one of Shadow Wu's legs and slashed her claws in between armor plates. She ravaged the vulnerable flesh under them, causing black ichor to spurt out like blood. She could feel Shadow Wu recoil and growl in pain before it reached its head down intending to snap up the raptor before she got a chance to retreat. But rather than raptor flesh, all the Ultimasaurus got was a mouthful of wind magic that ripped and tore at its much more sensitive mouth. The shadow recoiled and the momentary distraction was more than enough for Roxanne to get out of the Shadow's attack range.

"Don't you know it's rude to strike a lady?" Morgana grinned, as his persona clad in blue pointed its winged staff. Five more tornadoes roared to life and burst upwards, razing the shadow’s body with potent wind magic. "You're up, Panther!"

"Got it Mona!" Ann grinned, "Hectate! Time to dish out some pain!" The girl's Persona emerged, holding two hellhounds held by the leash. Hectate raised her hand upwards and called forth a pillar of hellfire to torch the abomination from below. Boosted by Morgana's Magarudyne, the Agidyne roared and doubled in strength, creating a hellish firestorm all around Wu. The Shadow screeched in pain before it emerged from the flames, burned but not severely damaged, right at Ann. The girl grinned as she easily side-stepped the strike as she called up a Matarunda. But to her dismay the spell fizzled on impact with Shadow Wu's scales rather than weaken the Shadow.

"Great it's immune to debuffs." Ann growled, "That's going to be annoying. We're going to have to be careful," she warned the others, missing the thoughtful look in Roxanne's eyes.

"More than one way to skin a rat..." the older Looper grinned. "I've got an idea."

Before she could explain Shadow Wu threw back its horned head and gave a long reverberating roar that echoed around the jungle-like garden.

Two more high pitched roars answered from the foliage as a pair of Shadow Dinosaurs charged forward to join their master. The two newcomers were smaller than the colossal Ultimasaur but it was obvious that the two were just as deadly. The pair of shadows growled as they circled the Loopers, circling their would-be prey. Their scales were unhealthily white, like the pallor of bleached bones, and there were jet black spikes that broke through cracks in the scales on their backs. Long razor sharp claws scraped against each other on appendages that looked uncannily like human hands.

Their jaws contained too many over crowded teeth that promised a painful if not fatal bite, but what was worse where the ruby red eyes that held an almost human level of intelligence behind them. But the intelligence within those eyes were cruel; only possessing the desire to maim and kill.

"Gonna take a stab in the dark and guess that those are those 'Indominus' that the bastard cooked up," Ryuji groaned as he adjusted his grip on weapon. "Ugly motherfuckers."

Morgana watched the two new opponents enter the fray with instincts honed to kill. "You said you had a plan?" he asked Roxanne. "The rest of us will distract the Indomini while you and Joker take care of Wu." Roxanne nodded before she turned to Akira.

"Think you can cover me so I can get the jump on him?" she asked.

Akira grinned fiendishly, "Child's play. Come, Arsene!"

Roxanne dashed away as the raven-like Persona was called upon once more, scaling a tumor-ridden tree with ease and tensed waiting in the branches. The Indomini shrieked and snarled as they were buffeted by wind, lightning and fire but Roxanne ignored them; her sole focus was on Shadow Wu.

Arsene's Brave Blade cleaved across the Shadows chest making it howl in pain as force of the physical attack sent it staggering backwards. It was at that moment that Roxanne jumped, clawing for purchase as she landed on Shadow Wu's spiked back. The sharpened plates cut into her scales but she ignored it clambering across the Ultimasaur's back.

The Shadow finally noticed her when she had to take a jump over the protective frill that saved his neck from harm. The Shadow snarled and howled, slamming and shaking its head, looking to either throw the raptor off him completely or to make her lose her grip and fall into range of his gnashing teeth.

"Trumpeter!" Akira intoned as Arsene faded for a different Persona, one cloaked in white and gold with a gilded trumpet in hand, "Heat Riser!"

The Persona brought its trumpet to its lips and played; its song roused Roxanne's body as energy danced and wove around her scaled form. She could power course through her body as she clung onto the Shadow's form with a much stronger grip than before.

"Thanks for the boost!" she grinned as she moved to one of the beast's golden horns, right above one of the Shadow's eyes. "Here's how you do a manual Accuracy debuff!"

Roxanne's enhanced claws maimed and butchered the Shadow's eye, causing it to screech and howl in agony. The huge Dinosaur desperately clawed at its own snout to force her off, barely missing the Looper with each attack. Unwilling to take her chances, Roxanne dropped to the ground rolling to dissipate her momentum.

Howling mad with pain the Ultimasaur turned to slam its heavy spiked tail into the ground to crush the thieves. But thanks to Roxanne's maiming attack the tail went wide, knocking down a few cankerous trees and carving a shallow trench into the ground rather than to slam into the Loopers.

The Indomini were faring little better. Morgana's Garudyne had ravaged and torn their thick hide apart until Ann's Agidyne erupted beneath one of the two Indomini, causing it to screech in agony as it burned. The Shadow collapsed; dissolving back into black ichor while the second one limped towards its master, smoking from the numerous Ziodynes and the other physical assaults it had endured. It turned to its master, crooning and begging for help.

In response Shadow Wu seized it by its neck and snapped the shadow's neck with a loud crunch. "The weak are the food for the strong!" the shadow roared, maddened by power. "That is the way the world operates!"

"Hey! That was my kill!" Ryuji protested as the Indominus' shadows melded into Wu. The ichor and muck from the Shadow's body healed and rejuvenated the Ultimasaurus, though the clawed out eye remained untouched.

"Annnnnd now the bastard heals himself, just perfect! " Roxanne hissed ready for another round.

Akira's stance hardened as his eyes narrowed. "It's time to end this farce." Roxanne faltered, confused as Akira walked past her. Blue flames beginning to gather on his black overcoat without a single sign or burning or harming the boy. With every step that Akira took towards the Shadow, more flames began to engulf his body and bathed him in their fiendish light.

"Joker?" Roxanne asked with concern. But it was ignored as Akira stopped right in front of the crippled Shadow as flames danced and licked his clothing.

The white mask on his face burned azure as a pillar of flame rose. The human opened his mouth to speak, but his voice echoed with an unearthly presence and power. It was enough to send warning bells in Roxanne's head as power rose and sang in a hellish chorus.

"I am thou. Thou art I..." Blue flames swirled and coalesced around the Wild Card. Gold and Ebony emerged from the flames as a being, both angelic and demonic, coalesced within the pillar of energy.

"From the Sea of thy Soul, I rise." Three pairs of wings, webbed and feathered simultaneously, spread and beat once, causing Shadow Wu to stagger backwards. The staff flew from his grip and was sent flying a good distance away from the fray.

"I am the Slayer of Gods, the Lord of Rebellion," An armored body, immaculately forged from onyx and gold, glowed with unearthly power. Two golden horns and piercing red eyes, crowned by a winged halo of black metal, ascended from the azure pyre.

"I am Satanael!" Akira's Ultimate Persona declared to the void, wings outstretched in all of their divine demonic splendor. At the sight of the Persona, winged and garbed in black and gold, Shadow Wu stepped back and cowered. Akira grinned manically as Satanael raised his silver and gold rifle skywards with his right hand. Holy light, golden and radiant, gathered around the weapon's muzzle while blasphemous light, black and crimson, gathered into a roiling orb in his left hand.

"Thou whom proclaimeth to be God..." Akira and Satanael spoke in unison as their power surged.

Satanael crushed the orb of vile energy in his left hand and pulled the trigger of his gun. A lake of onyx and crimson writhed and churned below the dinosaur's feet, growing darker and darker with each passing second. Countless stars high above the dinosaur began to dance and sing with power, growing brighter and brighter with each rotation.

"Thy end has come!"

The bubbling sea of pitch black parted and gave rise to a serpent's head, its crimson eyes glowing with malevolent intent. The stars above burned with light as a massive column of light that descended down upon Shadow Wu with divine fury. The jaws of the black viper snapped shut, shattering Wu's scaly hide from below before the pillar of starlight crashed into the Shadow from above. The two Almighty attacks crashed into the same target, engulfing the entirety of Wu's body in undiluted destruction.

The shockwave sent everyone, save Akira and Roxanne, backwards as the palace was nearly annihilated by the attack. When the smoke finally cleared, Wu was standing in the crater left by the combined attacks, defeated and batter, but alive. The staff was, thankfully, untouched by the destruction.

"Dude," Ryuji gaped as everyone else got back to their feet. "That was completely overkill."

Akira gave a wry grin before he shrugged, "It was dragging on for too long. Better to end it now than to waste another hour fighting that thing."

Roxanne snorted and approached Shadow Wu, shifting her cognitive form to something a bit more human as she approached. The form was imperfect with scales and other saurian features distorting the image, but it was good enough for what Roxanne wanted to do. She looked down upon him trying to grasp the cane just out of his reach.

"You're pathetic Wu," she sighed, looking disappointed as she picked up the cane. She turned the cane in her clawed hands, feeling its familiar weight. "You're nothing but a toddler throwing a tantrum."

Shadow Wu shakily managed to get up onto it's hands and knees, "No....No.....I-I just....I wanted to prove myself."

"Maybe that's how you started.... But proving yourself ended when you planned the mass murder of thousands of innocent people," Roxanne sighed as she shook her head. "It ended when you tried to sell psychotic living weapons to the highest bidder."

The older Looper got down and looked at the groveling Wu straight in the eyes with nothing more than a look of pity on her face, "Want to prove something? Prove there's still a shred of humanity left in you. Go back to your other self, destroy the Indomini, and confess everything you've done. You'll either spend the rest of your life in a cell or get the death penalty, but at least you'll prove that you have the tiniest bit of human decency left in you."

Shadow Wu hung his head and vanished as the ground began to rumble and shake under the Looper's feet. Roxanne closed her eyes and exhaled, tossing the cane to Morgana as she did so. The cat purred happily as he held the treasure close as if it was made from cat-nip rather than bamboo.

"Feel free to keep it," Roxanne stated as she shifted back into her raptor form, "Now then, let's get out of here."

[Persona 5], [Yu-Gi-Oh! ARC-V]
(no title)
Author: Garebel
Status: NON-CANON

Akira and Morgana opened the door to the roof. Ann was already there, and Awake, talking to the Looper who replaced Ryuji.

"So, it's actually rare to not harm Kamoshida physically?" The looper asked Ann who nodded.

"Baseline, he drove one of my friends, Shido to try and commit Suicide. We basically decided to prank the hell out of him, instead of killing him thanks to the Loops." Ann explained, before noticing Akira. "Hey, Leader!" She waved, drawing the looper's attention to Akira.

"Why the heck are you wearing those glasses!?" The looper all but shouted, while Ann giggles. Akira finds the funniest glasses to wear sometimes…

"Everything's set?" Akira asked, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he's wearing the so-called Grouch Marx Glasses. The looper, while flustered at his question being ignored, nodded. "Good! We will begin soon…"

"We must have given Kamoshida quite a 'shock' with that calling card. Who knew using Neon Lights will be so effective?" Ann commented, getting an ignored glare from the Looper.

"Sorry, Yuto, but you have to get used to it. You're replacing Ryuji, whose the Lighting User of our group." Morgana explained to the Looper. Yuto's eye twitched, before slamming his head on the desk.

"After this heist, I'm going to grab a heavy drink…". Yuto moaned.

…

"GaH!! YoU BaStArD!!". Shadow Kamoshida yelled out as he struggled against the strange purple lightning prevented himself from moving and he took several swipes from a dragon. **"I kIlL yOu!!"** he treated his opponent, Yuto, who just flipped him the bird.

"Try that in the real world outside the school. See how far that gets you." Yuto taunted, causing Kamoshida to focus more on him, preventing him from realizing that he lost his Treasure, and the others were escaping with it.

"YoU lItTlE pIeCe Of…" Kamoshida yelled out in pain, as Yuto's Persona used Zionga on Kamoshida.

"Speak to Dark Rebellion." Yuto calmly stated, Dark Rebellion Xyz Dragon flying back behind Yuto, the blue flames covering the dragon revealing it as Yuto's Persona. Suddenly the palace started collapsing, telling Kamoshida that his Treasure was in the castle anymore, check the top of his head, confirming to be true.

"YoU…WhAt ArE yOu DoInG!?". Kamoshida yelled out, noticing Yuto was on Dark Rebellion's back, before the dragon flew out one of the windows. **"DaMn YoU!!!!"**. He yelled out as he was crushed by the rubble of his palace.

…

May 3rd
Yuto blinked as he read the news, and discovered why Kamoshida didn't come to school. The gang soon gather on the school roof, all equally disturbed. Akira decided to give a LONG-standing order, right then and there.

"We will stay to make SURE the Shadow returns to their owner, and not crushed by the rubble of their Palace, otherwise…" Akira said, pointing to the article of the Real Kamoshida committing Suicide after he confessed his sin to the police, "…we can't stop them from making amends by killing themselves, instead of serving Time in Jail." Everyone agreed to that order, Ann noting it, as to inform her the other members of the Phantom Thieves, when they join or Awaken.

"…really wish I can play a game of Duel Monsters to get this of my mind…" Yuto sighed, the plan of distracting Kamoshida while the others escape with the Treasure was made by him on the spot, and thus made him ashamed of himself.

Miscellaneous 18

[Persona 5], [Jurassic World]
Dinosaur Eden – part 6
Author: GarnettFoxy

Claire stopped short as she walked into the meeting room. "Miss Hammond....You don't normally attend meetings."

"I don't normally get invited to them....Which is really an oversight." Roxanne mused as she filed her claw like nails "I will be taking full control of Jurassic World when I hit twenty one." She shrugged "Still I was made a part of this meeting, do you know what it's about?"

Claire sighed sitting down next to her "I don't, I think it might have something to do with a new project Doctor Wu was supposed to be working on but there's been nothing through official channels." Roxanne patted her shoulder watching as other people filtered in, She glanced at Lowery who nodded and looked up at a camera, at her signal this meeting would be broadcast to the entire island and recorded for any news sites that picked it up.

Ten minutes after the meeting was supposed to start Wu finally stumbled in, he looked like a beaten man as he walked up to the head of the table "Well now that we're all her-"
"I have done something unforgivable." He croaked, Roxanne glanced at Lowery who started the broadcast "What I have done I can only try and desperately put right, when this meeting is over I'll be turning myself in."

"Now Henry." Masrani placated standing "Henry your over worked, you need a rest-"

"My self and Hoskins of the Raptor training program are working for the military. I co-opted the project you proposed to create a new dinosaur to attack new visitors for an experiment in blending human and Dinosaur DNA and creating a trainable weapon."

The room was dead silent as horror dawned on everyone who hadn't known about the Indominus.

"You WHAT?!" Roxanne barked with fake surprise and real anger "Human DNA experimentation is strictly prohibited, only one lab in the USA has permission to even attempt. And making a Human Dinosaur hybrid?! Are you insane?!"

"I....I wanted to prove myself, prove that...That I was better then anyone else, I wanted to be a god....And instead became a monster...." He pulled out a large pair of eggs from his labcoat pockets. "These.....Are the two only viable embryos I was able to create...." He dropped them. Roxanne looked away as the eggs hit the ground and shattered covering the floor in embryonic fluid and left two tiny curled up saurian forms dead on the ground. As much as she hated the Indominus seeing a egg callously destroyed like that cut at the motherly loopers heart.

"I already called the US government and Costa Rica officials before I came here, there will be a boat waiting to take me away to be put on trail...." Wu dithered before approaching Roxanne. "When John died I did something disrespectful to his memory. I still his cane and replaced it with a fake, I felt no one else deserved something so precious to his memory. It's in my employee flat, I trust that you as his heir can chose what best to do with it."

Roxanne nodded "...He loved you like a son..."

"And I betrayed his memory, I'm sorry."

Roxanne watched him go in silence. *'Sorry dad, you may forgive him for what he does, but I don't think I ever will.'*

…

"Soooo I can't actually pay you in money, I don't keep any loop to loop and people will notice if I divert Jurassic World funds soooo." Roxanne shrugged as the four younger loopers looked around her subspace "Help yourself to a few things each, Weapons are just past the spaceships. touch anything in the hotel I eat you...Oh there's a couple of plants you guys might like."

"Hotel? You keep a hotel?" Ann questioned Roxanne nodding and picking up some tokens off a desk.

"Yup, I run the only Looper Only hotel in the multiverse, I usually take it out during massive fused loops, people trade me what ever they want for loop long stays. I've got....Well pretty much anything you can imagine in there. Here." She tossed them all a couple of tokens "Enough for you and the rest when they loop, each good for ten loops each if you ever want to take a load off."

"Your inviting thieves into your hotel." Akira chuckled the two he was holding vanishing into his pocket.

"Your already in my subspace, and people have stolen shit from me before. Ahh here's one of the plants I was talking about! Littlefoot didn't say where their from but if you sick you can give this thing a sample of your blood and in a few hours it's created a fruit that'll cure you without fail. I've got a green house full of them at this point so help yourself!"

[Persona – all games]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

"You're not going to win," Igor said to his duplicate, who was sitting in his chair.

The fake just stared at him. "And why not?" he asked him.

The real Igor, in a cell, had chuckled. "Isn't it obvious?" he asked him. "It's not just the humans you're manipulating that are on the playing field. There are others who have the gift

of the Wild Card, and if not them, there are those that who would notice that I'm gone." He then gave out a smile. "And while the humans are mostly unaware of your actions, some still have a direct connection to this place."

The fake just laughed. "All the more reason to go on with this plan. Because those humans are no longer aware of your presence, it just gives me more freedom to dictate my players."

Igor shook his head. "And you're still a fool, Yaldabaoth." That caught his attention. "While it is true that the Fool is a powerful thing, you're more of an Inversed Fool. I wasn't talking about the humans."

And it was at that moment when the singing and piano music within the Velvet Room stopped. Entering the Velvet Room were two blindfolded males and a woman whose hairdo blocked her ears.

"Did you think the Velvet Room was empty when you took over and made it your own?" one of the males asked the fake Igor. "We've heard and seen everything."

The real Igor's smile was genuine while the fake Igor was shocked. "DA," he said, looking at the artist. "Belladonna. Nanashi. Welcome back."

The impostor glared. "More of your apprentices?" he asked the real one.

"Don't mistake their actions as apathetic," the real Igor replied. "They've been busy looking for a wayward apprentice while Lavenza's relatives were fixing their current state."

"Personally," a voice replied, a short-haired woman wearing blue replied, "I find this kind of parlor trick to be rather...unpleasant. And when I heard about my youngest sister being split in two, I decided to take a break from my personal quest and...check up on her condition, as the humans would say."

"Your appearance in Shibuya DID cause quite a ruckus, Elizabeth," an older woman replied, walking in. "But we hope that your newfound ability comes in handy."

Elizabeth smiled at her older sister. "Margaret," she said, "I know all too well that you worry about my well-being. But I have been getting stronger ever since my departure and meeting one of the other Wild Cards."

"Yes," a male voice replied. "And you still have me worry, Elizabeth. Knowing you, we had to explain why we're rather inactive. But Yaldabaoth decided to force our hands when he put not only both Contract Holders and Lavenza at stake." He then glared at the fake Igor. "You weren't planning to uphold your end of the bargain even when they won."

"That's because humans are rather Chaotic," the fake Igor replied, dropping the smile. "They're not a species that deserves free will, and..."

"They are what gave you life to begin with," Igor retorted. "Or have you forgotten the circumstances of your existence?"

And that's when the final voice was heard.

"And you've become the very thing you've fought against, Yaldabaoth," the youngest replied, shocking the fake Igor. "The minds of humanity are not your playthings. And as such, you, a being of Order, have become the Chaos he's trying so hard to quash."

The fake Igor then growled, but chuckled. "And yet the game still goes on," he said. "Even without my existence. Shame I have to erase every single one of you..." Then Igor started chuckling. "And what's so funny?"

"I don't think you'll get the chance," Igor replied. "Check your pocket."

The Fake Igor did and was shocked at the object in question. And judging by the looks of all seven Velvet Room residents, they know what the item was...and Igor's chuckling increased.

Nanashi had cracked his knuckles while Belladonna did some stretches. DA didn't even need to see what it was, but he gave out a growl. Lavenza intensified her death glare while Theodore and Margaret brought out their Compendiums.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, gave out a very sadistic smile. "Forgive my language, Master," she said, "and I'm still working on my compliments, but...you're a magnificent bastard."

"Forgiven," the real Igor said. "You don't live for thousands of years without learning a few things." He then looked at Yaldabaoth and smirked. "That is just an insurance policy to make sure the Velvet Room remains intact and they focus on you. Call it a parting gift."

"Upstart blue-clad assho..." And that's when the first All-Out Attack had started, cutting off the fake in horror.

...

Outside the Velvet Room, the Wild Cards and their friends (as well as two other groups of Persona Users) were watching the whole fight...or rather, the outright beatdown of the Usurper.

"I think we should tape this for Minato and Shinjiro," Junpei said to Futuba. "They're not here, but they probably want to see what happened."

Futuba nodded as she looked at the others. "Sure thing, Coach," she replied. "Although I don't remember there being this many people here."

"Igor wanted us to meet you guys," Maya said, looking around. "This must have been something he was planning in advance."

Tatsuya nodded. "He IS a servant of Philemon," he replied. "Magnificent planning must run in the chain of command."

Kei Nanjo got the idea. "Although I'm not sure why a coin toss had to decide between my organization and Kirijo's here," he muttered.

"Probably because the other places we meet are way too public for our knowledge," Mitsuru replied. "That, and by now, we can't use our old dorms."

Yu got the idea as he looked at the beatdown, cringing. "That has to hurt, though," he muttered.

"It's also very cathartic," Morgana replied, crawling in cat form. "This guy used the Metaverse for a dangerous game, knowing far too well that there would be people who would abuse the power to manipulate emotions. I'd say he deserves it."

No one could deny that Morgana was right.

"That reminds me," Mitsuru said, "I've been meaning to ask...due to the fact that you're able to access the Metaverse via your cell phones, would that mean Aegis and Narukami have access to it?"

Naoto looked at her. "That's the same line of questioning I had with Akira and the others being possible to enter the TV World," she added. "I had been trailing you and the Shadow Operatives for undercover work, and I saw that Aegis here had the same gift Narukami had."

Akira blinked. "Maybe after we see the results of how this turns out," he said. "Although it probably wouldn't just be me."

Mark just gave out a sigh. "Entering the TV," he muttered. "And I thought Maki's consciousness was confusing...no offense meant."

"None taken, Mark," Maki replied.

Katsuya thought about that one. "First time I heard about it," he said, "I was skeptical, but then I remembered that Tatsuya and I were Persona Users...so we did a little experimenting."

"Long story short," Tatsuya replied. "our hands entered the TV. And Katsuya was one of the few on the force that believed that the Inaba Case had actual fact."

Yosuke then gave them a look. "If it wasn't for the circumstances," he said, "I would have wished you guys had shown up in Baseline."

"Yeah," Jun muttered, "it was not a good moment for any of us."

"We were busy on our careers," Reiji replied. "It's been ages since our adventures against the Snow Queen and SEBEC, and we mostly kept tabs with the Shadow Operatives on activities involving Personas. Heck, Nanjo here is more of a financial backer for the rest of us like Kirijo here."

"Same goes for me and Kanami," Rise said. "Not everyone makes a transition from Idol Singer to Solo Careers, and we were some of the lucky few that did. We still kept in contact with Yu and the others, and Nanako's in high school by now."

Ryuji nodded. "It doesn't surprise us in the least," he said. "Yusuke here is an aspiring painter, so he'd probably be busy with his work unless he's got a block."

"And I know exactly who to turn to in order to get rid of that block," Yusuke added, smirking at his friends. "An artist tends to find inspiration in the most unlikely of sources."

Kanji nodded. "That reminds me," he said, "I've been busy on a project ever since we were first introduced." He then brought out small plush objects based on the Phantom Thieves and their Personae. "I couldn't decide on which one to settle on, so I decided to go for both."

That caught the entirety of the Phantom Thieves off-guard.

"Whoa," Haru said. "They're...adorable."

"Not what I was thinking," Makoto replied, "but the likeness is amazing."

Ann nodded. "What kind of material did you use, Kanji?"

Kanji shrugged. "Same yarn I usually have," he said. "Just in bulk. You'd be surprised how much of a hit the Jack Frost plushies are."

"Now I understand why Shinjiro started to panic when I saw him feed Koromaru," Aegis replied, the dog resting.

"It's not that embarrassing," Ekichi said. "It's not often you get to see a guy that dabbles in plushie-making and being proud of it."

Ryuji gave out a giant grin. "Still, kudos, Kanji," he said to the older male.

Yusuke nodded. "You do have the makings of an artist, Tatsumi," he said, smiling.

"Thanks, man," Kanji said.

Yosuke gave out a smile before looking at the screen. "They're not running out of energy here," he said.

"Well, he is a God," Akira replied. "The man has to have a healing ability somewhere, and adding the Omnipotent Orb may have been vital to making sure that their assault on Yaldabaoth does not let up."

"Unstoppable force meets immovable object," Aegis muttered. "But I sense there's another purpose involved with Igor's move."

"Like what?" Labrys asked her younger sister.

"The Velvet Room itself. I believe Igor pulled it off in order to make sure the battle doesn't damage the collective unconscious."

Somehow, Igor's move seemed a lot more brilliant in hindsight.

"He's a lot more brilliant than I initially suspected," Kei muttered.

And the video continued from there, Yaldabaoth having screaming moments.

"Stop it!" the fake Igor yelled, before getting hit with another All-Out Attack. "STOP IT!" he yelled. "ANGRY!"

"That's just more entertaining than it should be," Teddie muttered, hearing the man yelling those.

All Yaldabaoth knew was pain, and the Residents weren't even going all-out in their beatings. In fact, they were getting rather...creative in their All-Out Attacks.

Igor just smiled within his cell as he waited for the impostor, usurper, and walking hypocritical god-complex to either surrender or fade out, and then he can end the video.

'*The important things about a contract,*' Igor thought, smiling as he relaxed on his cell bed, '*are the loopholes and the exact words. While it is true that I cannot interfere in a quest, what I can do is put them in the right direction. That, and I never directly interfered.*'

[Persona 5], [RWBY]
(no title)
Author: Alastair Dragovich

"O-oh! So you're Loopers from another Branch! ...I did get that right, right?"

"Yes Akira," Ruby said to the Looper from the newest Persona Loop from her seat on what is charitably called his bed. "So, how are you getting used to Looping so far?"

"Well, I can never take the Big Bang Burger challenge again thanks to my trauma, but otherwise it's been surprisingly fun," Akira shrugged before getting a pensive look. "Say, I think one of the Inaba Loopers mentioned something about a group of Loopers rebelling against baseline or something? Are you...?"

Pyhrra, along with the rest of teams RWBY and JNPR, nodded from their respective places in his room. "Yes, that happens to be us. Why do you ask?"

Akira nodded as a small smile grew on his face. "Well, then I guess this Loop will go by rather quickly this time. Not only is everyone here at the start of the Loop, but your Personas will probably be extra powerful because of your rebellious nature and your nature as Loopers. In fact, I kinda have been looking forward to it ever since I heard about you guys."

The others slowly began to smile and nod at the thought.

"Yeah, this will be cool," Yang smiled and nodded. "Now I'll be able to Punch people with my fists AND with my mind."

"I can break GHOST Legs!" Nora grinned eagerly.

"Plus it has to fit with rebelllious spirit, right? It'll be perfect for us!" Ruby cheered, an eager smile on her face.

Akira nodded. This was going to be-

...

-completely unexpected.

Teams RWBY and JNPR, sitting in their various spots in the coffee shop, refused to loop anywhere near the native Looper. After a long moment of silence from the most recent events in the loop, the leader of the Phantom thieves sighed and broke the silence.

"...so, I think it's important that we learn something every loop," Akira said slowly, mimicking something he heard from a tabletop rpg GM once. "What have we learned here today?"

"If we want to steal the mob boss's heart, don't join the organization and become an unstoppable ally by breaking all of his opposition's legs at once, thus creating an impossible to beat mental representation of yourself in his Palace?" Nora offered with a nervous grin.

"Castrating Shadows in a Palace before letting them rejoin their host leads to some strange consequences, especially in the case of Kamoshida," Blake mumbled as she pointedly looked away from Akira's wince.

"Running an art school from prison leads to some truly disturbing art, and one should never encourage that to the forgery artist's shadow?" Ren replied in well-faked nonchalance.

"A wedding ring running off of ancient and incredible powers from another loop are a good substitute for Ultimate Personas under the right circumstances? ...sorry," Pyhrra put her face in her hands as Akira shuddered.

"Don't ever get a maid," Jaune said simply as he pointedly ignored the fresh bruising on his face.

"Never take the Big Bang Burger challenge," Yang said, looking a little sick. "At least, not without looking for any health code violations first."

"Never split the party," Weiss huffed as the rest of her team glared at her as she added under her breath, "at least not when you're a mascot character."

"...just because you go about being a thief in a mystical world based on the unconcious doesn't mean its okay to be a vigilante in real life," Ruby sat in silence as the group's glares turned towards her. "...*especially* when your standard weapon load out makes you look like the Grimm Reaper and, as a result, makes the optional super boss as strong as the Mob Boss's Cognitive Nora."

"And I have learned that if you want the visiting Loopers to get Personas, you don't let them use their out of Loop powers," Akira finished, punctuating his point by banging his head against the table. "This wasn't even a Null Loop. How did you all mess that up *that badly*?"

"In our defense, our baseline selves never really had to work hard to overcome their fear of authority in the first place," Weiss did not say any of this with a sullen pout. "And that became less of a problem as the Loops went on."

Akira's only response was to continue to bang his head against the table, prompting Sojiro to yell at him to stop that. None of the perpetrators in the room blamed him. They probably wouldn't be able to live this down either anytime soon.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

Caroline and Justine looked at the persona that Akira just made.

"It is the right kind of Persona…" Caroline stated, approvingly.

"But did it get the skill we requested? He better not be joking!!" Justine yelled out.

The Persona responded by moving its hands, and the Twins soon was covered in a dark green aura. They both looked at each other.

"Huh, it did…Caroline?"

"Yes, Justine?"

"We'll ignore any Personas born from Public Executions, from now on." Justine deadpaned.

"How was I supposed to know I was going to create Hecatoncheires when I offered up Lilim for the Public Execution!?" Akira yelled out!

[Persona 5], [Harry Potter], [Marvel Comics], [Transformers]
Akira's List – Loops edition! (title added by compiler, but the snip was inspired by the fic in question)
Author: Garebel (for the snip)
Status: I think it was rejected… :(

"1. Even though you have magic powers, messy hair and glasses, that does not make you Harry Potter."

Harry and Dudley covered their mouth to hide their laughter. Most of the time, Harry would be mad if someone else got mistaken for him.

He couldn't blame them for mistaking Akira for him, they both looked very similar.

"You sure he's not a lost Potter Relative?" Vernon asked Harry, who nodded.

"I'm sure!" Harry said, the Dursleys and Harry were enjoying the Wizarding World making complete fools of themselves on Television. All because of them failing to Akira over and over again on live television.

…

“3.This also doesn't make Akechi Draco.”

Lucious Malfoy twitches his eyebrow in anger.

Why was his Son, Akechi Malfoy, stealing his Dark Artifacts, giving to the Ministry of Magic for a large sum of money and not coming home with it!?

…

"Where is all this money coming from!?" Ron heard his mother yelled out in confusion, before turning to the culprit.

"If only you lived in Baseline, Akechi…" Ron muttered out.

"Hey, if I was here in baseline, then I would be no better than Draco!" Akechi pointed out.

…

“7.Mokoto's Persona is Johana, not Ghostrider the Spirit of Vengeance”

Ghost Rider looked at the new Looper before decided to say it.

"Ok, I'll bite. Why do you look like a female version of me?"

Mokoto, whose head is now a skull on fire, just stares at Ghost Rider before she answered.

"Apparently, having a Persona also being a Motorcycle, somehow qualified…" she grumbled out.

"Wait, they can be Motorcycles now? Why hasn't anyone told me!?" Ghost Rider ranted.

"Probably because I'm the first to do so." She answered, to Ghost Rider's Surprise.

"That would make sense actually…"

…

“8. It is also not a transformer”

Ratchet watched in amusement as the 'Arcee' of this Loop swore up a storm.

"Well, at least we know the Loops have a chance of Making any Looper loop in as Transformers." Jack Darby stated, giving a nervous laugh as Mokoto, who was replacing Arcee continued swearing.

[Persona 5], [One Piece]
(no title)
Author: Alastair Dragovich

Morganna yowled in frustration as the leader of the Phantom Theives, and Ryuji, approached their compatriot.

"Hey, what's got your fur all in a bunch?" Ryuji asked as they let their friend out.

"It's- it's nothing," Morganna lied quickly as she left the cell. "L-let's get going already."

Akira raised an eyebrow, but considering that the shadows seemed to be especially riled up this time around, he figured it could wait until later. And so it did.

Until about 5 minutes later when they turned a corner and Morganna was missing.

"Wait- what the- Wherre did that effing cat go?" Ryuji sputtered, his eyes darting back and forth as he searched fro the suspiciously mascot shaped thief.

"Maybe they went to use the restroom?" Akira hedged, prompting Ryuji to give him a <Look>. It was an exapsperated <Look>, but it was a <Look> nonetheless.

"Let's just go find that cat..."

A few minutes of searching later, and they found their compatriot. Behind the bars of the cell that, until earlier, had held Kamoshida.

"I... I can explain?" Morganna laughed nervously.

"Can you?" Akira asked in genuine curiosity.

"...No I can't..." The cat sighed, plopping down on its rump. "I had Woken up early this time, so I had decided to try and reunite with you guys earlier than usual. However... something went wrong, and I ended up in the United States."

Ryuji's eyes bugged out of his head. "The-The United States? Of America?"

"Yep. I ended up in America. I was just as shocked as you, so I tried to fly back here, only to end up in Russia somehow..." Morganna admitted, a blush forming on its face. "I tried making my way to the coast, which I eventually did... only it was in Africa."

Akira grimaced. "At least you've learned a lot about geography..."

"Well, thankfully, despite taking a boat to South Korea, I ended up somehow back in Shibuya. At that point I tried finding you guys again, but... I ended up in my cell somehow," Morganna sighed, the blush at an all time high. "I just... sort of gave up at that point and waited for you guys."

"As hilarious as that was, we should get out of here now before-"

Before Ryuji could finish his sentence, some knights showed up. Without any more cues than that, Akira, now in his Joker outfit, tore off the shadow's mask and the group got into positions.

"I think I'll take all of my frustration out on you first!" Morganna declared. "Zorro!"

And so, a Persona appeared and annihilated the Shadow. However, all of the combatants paused when they noticed that something was off.

Instead of its usual color scheme, its shirts were much simpler and white in coloration while its pants were more green than black and held up by some sort of sash. Its cap and hat were missing, and the headband it wore was the same dark green that is pants were. And to top it off, instead of one rapier, it was wielding three sword that were suspiciously katana shaped.

"...First, I end up on that weird island and fell down the well," The persona grumbled to the surprise of everybody. "Then I end up in a duel with that strange guy in the cape in that strange sea of souls crap, and now I've now been summoned by a cat."

The swordsman, known as Roronoa Zoro, spat out his blade and looked at the group. "Can anyone tell me what the hell's going on here?"

"Things are making a lot more sense, for one thing," Ryuji nodded as Akira began explaining what he had guessed had happened.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Detective Ethan Redfield

Tae Takemi almost sighed when the boy entered her clinic asking for medicine. Another person coming for cheap drugs, no doubt. He led the boy into her examination room. He looked at her and gave her a blank look. "Doc, I need help."

He sighed before rambling, "I wondered into a castle that had once been my school that was now ruled by a pervert volleyball teacher that adapted himself as a king of the castle. He threw me into a dungeon, where I broke out after becoming demon possessed. And now my cat is talking to me. It's the third time that's happened in as many years."

Tae blinked for several seconds as a black cat leaped out of his school bag and...for lack of a better term...smacked him in the back of the head with a paw. And somehow it seemed to make the boy flinch in pain. Tae looked at a chart in her hand before muttered, "Alright. I can prescribe you some anti-psychotics. Or maybe you should go see a priest."

Akira looked surprised. "Huh? Oh, no, that not necessary. No, I'm feeling like I'm coming down with the Flu. Just some anti-biotics if you would."

Morgana smacked his paw against his own face.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Garebel
Status: PENDING (Akechi was not looping when this was written)

Akira looked over his Metaverse outfit. On occasion, his outfit, as well as the others, changes between loops. It was interesting, though, there were some loops that they refused to speak about. This Loop however…

"Are you S***ing me!? We're Phantom THEIVES, not Phantom Assassins!" Akira heard Ryuji cursed out. For some reason, Everyone, including Akechi, were dressed to looked like Assassins from that one branch, that Akira have trouble remembering.

"It makes sense in my case, but not the rest of you." Akechi spoke, with everyone else present agreeing on that.

"Now what are we going to this Loop?" Futaba asked.

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

"Why the hell do you have a bullet-proof vest?" Ryuji asked Akira, confused. "Akechi always aims for your head."

"It's not because of Akechi," the Joker replied. "There's always that Loop where I get the riot act from Sojiro or Sae."

Morgana gave out a flinch. "You're going to need a cup in that case," the cat snarked.

"That, I already thought of." He then groaned. "I'm still waiting for the other shoe to drop."

When they opened the door to LeBlanc, however, they had noticed a grey-haired visitor with a blue shirt, just sitting there.

"Narukami?" all three of them asked him.

Yu said nothing, but just gave a glare at the man with glasses. "So, we meet face to face, Kurusu," he said. "I think you have some explaining to do..."

"For the record," Akira muttered, "I had no idea that Nanako was my pen-pal and Shido was trying to make my life a living hell again, so could you give me a break?" He then noticed that Ryuji and Morgana had bolted...and groaned.

How the hell did his lack of contact with Nanako (this Loop, at least) managed to bring the man whose name is literally "You Become A God"? Worse...the man wasn't Awake.

This was going to suck.

[Persona 4], [The Thinning]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

Dojima blinked Awake as he saw Adachi drag an unconscious Nanako onto the couch. He let a Ping which Adachi turned to him and gave a return Ping.

"Is there a reason why my daughter is unconscious!?" Dojima growled out, to which Adachi blinked at.

"I had to stop Nanako from reaching the 'school'…" Adachi spat in disgust, which confused Dojima. Adachi noticed Dojima's confused expression. "Did you check your Loop Memories!?" Adachi asked Dojima, who shook his head.

"No, why…" Dojima stiffed as he looked over his memories for the Loop. The whole world, this Loop, decided to deal with the overpopulation problem, by KILLING all children who are not smart enough!? Dojima's response to this revelation was shown instantly as he transformed into his Demonic Form.

"Come, Adachi! We have a world to change!". Dojima commanded Adachi, who gave a psychotic grin.

"I was going to join you even if you didn't want me to." Adachi spoke, Magetsu Izanagi hovering over him, as if ready for a war.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: VS21

It only took Akira a couple of moments to realize just what had changed in this Loop and looking down at his paws only seemed to confirm it as a smiling human Morgana stood in the center of the attic saying, "Finally! I would've thought this had happened sooner rather than later!"

Akira just padded over to where normally Morgana would be before bedtime and said, "Loops often have a switch in position like this, it was inevitable, only a matter of when not if, Morgana."

Morgana smiled and said, "You know from my Loop Memories, Lady Ann seems rather smitten with me! In fact I think I should go and pay her a visit!" and immediately Akira couldn't resist and said to him with a catlike grin on his face, "Are you sure about that? You had quite a busy day today, let's go to sleep."

Morgana paled as he heard Akira say those familiar words and said, "It wasn't that busy a day, Akira!" to which Akira smugly replied, "Socializing with friends can be quite draining, something you know very well."

And with that Akira padded in front of Morgana and said, "Like I said, Morgana, let's go to sleep..."

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: VS21

"Uhh, Akira..." Ryuji said unsure about the plan that Akira had concocted with the aid of an Awake Ann, Futaba and Morgana along with the aid of a willing but UnAwake Haru on stopping Akechi from murdering Haru's father before he could confess his crimes and then caused the general population to turn against them...

"If you're still unsure about this plan Ryuji you can still opt out, but you have to admit, you've seen the test runs you know this works" Akira said to Ryuji while just focusing on fixing the laptop right in front of him.

"I-it's not that I'm worried about, I know that but we really can't afford to have him still trapped by this as the Palace collapses, but you say the Palace transporter works?" Ryuji asked as Morgana soon spoke saying, "I had to act as the test dummy sending myself from Kamoshida's Castle right into Sae's Casino, the trap is going to work Ryuji, we just need to wait for Futaba and Ann to give us the all clear on the trap."

Almost on cue, Akira looked at his spare cell phone used only for Phantom Thieves business since that one Loop where Shido's Conspiracy managed to hack into their regular phones...

Ann: Trap's ready! And I only ended up having to get out of the 2nd Level of Qimranut this time!

Futaba: Either way the transporter is ready along with the rest of the trap, we're good to go tomorrow

Akira smirked as he saw this and said, "Looks like its time, Calling Card's ready?"

Ryuji said, "Yup, me and Yusuke are ready to get it out!" as Akira looked out at the window and smiled to himself...

...

THE NEXT DAY

Goro Akechi knew what his Father's orders were to do, assassinate the Shadow of Okumura before the Palace Collapses thus killing him and preventing his crimes from becoming public...

What he didn't expect though was at the moment he raised his gun ready to shoot, for a pile of gigantic pancakes to come crashing down upon him and by the time he got out out the pile of pancakes, looked around to see that instead of the Big Bang Space Station surrounding him, instead was the darkened paths of Mementos...

The shrieks of Shadows approaching him surrounded him as he got ready to fight, the last thought he had before going into combat was that his Father was definitely not going to like the outcomes of this...

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: VS21

The Phantom Thieves of Hearts had seen many sights over the times they were Looping, from journeying into the TV World when they Looped into Yasogami High in Inaba, journeying in the Rift Between Time and countless other sights across the Multiverse...

The sight of Mystery Food X on the countertop to Cafe Leblanc was quickly becoming a familiar sight and scent to them much to their displeasure...

Akira had to make his thoughts heard saying, "This is the fourth time you've made Mystery Food X while trying to make curry Yusuke, I think that you should probably" He was quickly cut off though by Yusuke saying, "I was almost certain that I had it right that time, I've managed to cook other foods perfectly, why can't I make curry?!"

Ann quickly said, "Well, maybe it's just pure dumb luck influenced by Yggdrasil, right Morgana?" Morgana quickly shook his head from where he was sitting with Futaba, in the furthest booth from the countertop saying, "It'd be considered dumb luck if he slipped while holding all the ingredients and all of them managed to combine with a falling coffee shelf in the pot to form it, this isn't dumb luck, I think he might be cursed."

"As much as I had to say it bud, I think that may be it, I saw you cook the curry right there with all of the ingredients prepared already by Akira and somehow despite doing it perfectly you still made Mystery Food X" Ryuji said loudly to everyone in the room as Haru said, "Well, should we try to see if there's another Looper Awake here who's experienced in Curse removal?"

"Nope, we checked it earlier and unless they're preparing for a Stealth Run in this Loop, there isn't anyone, we're stuck with Inari's curse over curry" Futaba said from where she was sitting as Akira said, "Well, at least it's not as bad as the first time right?"

Yusuke frowned as he looked away from his work in shame remembering that...

[Persona 5], [Zootopia]
(no title)
Author: b-wolf95
Status: I think it was rejected.

Akira Woke up in the attic to find a fox in the place that Morgana usually occupied. The fox smirked at him and said, “Judging from your face, I must be throwing you for a Loop.”

“Yeah, but I just Woke up too.”

“Nick Wilde, visiting Looper from Zootopia.”

“Akira Kurusu, local Looper. So I take it you’re replacing Morgana this Loop.”

“Yep. Don’t worry, I’ve had my own share of adventures in the Metaverse before this Loop, so I’ve been doing a good job of being the mentor in his place. Check your Loop Memories if you want to.”

Akira did just that and found that Nick was true to his word. Outside of Mementos being more tiring than usual (“foxes turning in cars” isn’t exactly a common thought among the people of Tokyo), Nick was keeping close to what Morgana was doing in baseline. However, there was something about Nick’s Persona that made Akira ask what was, in hindsight, a stupid question.

“So, you’re a girl, right?”

It took Nick a few seconds to process the question. “Excuse me?”

“It’s just that you have a female Persona and all…”

“Do I sound like a girl to you?”

“Well, no, but Morgana sounds like a girl while still being male and has a male Persona as well.”

“…You know, I was going to let you leave tonight, but,” Nick leaped off the dresser and stepped in front of the stairs. “Judging by what you’re saying, you’re clearly way too out of it to anything other than go to sleep, so I’m going to make sure you don’t take a step down these stairs.”

Akira grimaced, until he was struck by an idea. He smirked and said, “Okay.” He then made a mad dash to the window…

…until an elephant tranquilizer dart hit his butt and he collapsed onto the floor.

Nick put the dart gun back into his Pocket. “Gotta remember to thank Judy for that.”

[Persona 3], [Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: VS21

The Revenge Request website was running just as planned for the trio of rogue Persona users that made up Strega, they were making good money with their requests and this latest request should be rather profitable for them...

Sure Chidori had brought up the idea of this being a trap considering that the target was the night shift janitor of Gekkoukan Elementary and that the cash offered for the assassination seemed a little too good to be true, but Takaya waved them off saying it's probably because he pissed off some high-powered loon with cash and so the three of them made their way to the Elementary School where soon enough, they would find their target in his coffin right in the middle of the school playground...

Chidori looked around with a strange feeling in her being saying, "I know you said that this would be easy money, but I can't help but get the feeling we're being watched" as Jin said, "Don't be too worried, Ikutsuki told us SEES are busy in Tartarus today so we're good" before heading to pry open the coffin.

He didn't get too far before having to jump back with the rest of Strega as bullets flew at him before Chidori called out, "Look!" to see a 10-year old kid on the roof wearing a red Featherman costume holding a pistol and aiming it at them with Takaya smirking and calling out to the kid, "Shouldn't you be asleep by now squirt?" to which the costumed kid saying, "I'm fully Awake thank you very much!"

"You sure you know how to shoot that thing, you could shoot your eye out!" Jin mocked the kid before the kid called back, "That was a warning shot, next shot I make is going to hit one of you"

"Why don't you come on down, you could hurt yourself up there" Takaya mockingly said before the kid said, "I would but I don't want to give up higher ground, so why don't you come up here and make me?"

Chidori watched as Jin took the kid up on his offer and went up to the roof and said, "You do realize what we're capable of right kid?" as the kid said back, "The fact that I'm Awake and moving right now seems to suggest the same for me..." before beginning to fidget with the pistol before dropping it and 'accidentally' shooting Jin in the Knee causing him to fall down from the roof.

"Jin!" Chidori called out in shock before Takaya snarled and called out his Persona Hypnos and said, "You wanted to fight kid, then let's get started" as Jin fell to the ground. If they saw the kid's mouth now though, they'd see a evil smile on his face as the kid grasped his mask and called out, "Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona!! Arsene!" As the mask was ripped off and Arsene made his appearance before Chidori looked behind them at a sudden sound behind them to see yet another kid around the same age as the first grasping the mask to their yellow Featherman costume and also calling out, "Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona! Seiten Tansei!" before the Monkey King Persona made his presence as Chidori and Jin came over to Takaya.

"I had a feeling this was a trap" Chidori said bluntly as Jin harped back, "Shut it, we need our Personas!" and soon called out Medea and Moros soon after that with Takaya saying, "We still outnumber you, you little brat" as the Red Ranger came down from the roof and said, "Not for long you don't"

With that he snapped his fingers kids in Feathermen Costumes came out from the surrounding bushes and trees causing Chidori to pale as she quickly put two and two together as the kid rangers began to summon...

"Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona! Hecate!" The ranger in green called out as she summoned her persona while the blue ranger called out, "Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona! Kamu Su-sanno!" bringing out the God of Storms...

The black ranger posed like the others before summoning her persona, "Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona! Anat!" Calling out the transforming Persona as the pink ranger did her poses before calling out, "Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona! Astarte!" bringing out the giant skull.

And the last of them was the cat-like being in the White Ranger costume with it posing before saying, "Phoenix Ranger Featherman Persona! Mercurius!" before bringing out the God's Messenger... Chidori looked up in an uncharacteristic show of fear only to see a glowing orb calling out, "Phoenix Ranger Support Alpha Prometheus is online!"

With that the red ranger said cheekily to them, "You still want to fight? Last chance to back out!"

Takaya snarled out and soon let loose with Hypnos with Moros and Medea soon following....

The battle was flashy and climactic much like any Featherman TV Show and just like Featherman the good guys won, with Takaya and Jin left on the ground unconscious as Chidori had a knee down, clearly exhausted from the fight...The kid rangers on the other hand looked hardly the worse for wear and seemed as if they had more energy to fight so she knew it was hopeless...

"I surrender" Chidori managed to get out before the red ranger said, "Good work team" and then the yellow and blue rangers came over to handcuff her and tied up the other members of Strega. She didn't struggle as they planted the handcuffs on her and her eyes widened as she saw the white ranger transform into a van before she was put in the back of the van along with the rest of Strega as the rangers all climbed into their van and drove off...

What they didn't know was that their fight with Strega had gained an audience from a distance...

"Wow!" An amazed Ken Amada said as he finished watching the fight through his binoculars as Akihiko took this in, "So let me get this straight, there's a bunch of kids and something that can transform into a car with Personas and all in Feathermen costumes am I right?"

"You got it pretty much down, though that was a pretty good fight" Junpei said to the group that was watching as the fourth person there Mitsuru said, "Ken if you can try to see if you can get closer with your classmates"

"Huh?" Ken asked her before saying, "You think those Persona users are in my class?"

"It's a possibility, I'll have the Kirijo Group put in an investigation into this, either way a group of unknown Persona users is troubling, until we can find them and get their motives to action, we need to be vigilant..."

The others nodded as SEES quickly went back to their dorms for the night...

[Persona 4], [Five Nights at Freddy's]
(no title)

Author: VS21

Tohru Adachi Awoke to the sound of an audio recording to find himself inside a small office that seemed very familiar to him following his last set of Loops...

'Not another one of these Fused Loops' Adachi thought to himself as he braced himself for the usual droning of Phone Guy before he heard the phrase, "By the way, I really hope you're wide Awake enough to hear this but there's certain characteristics involving several of our new animatronics as part of the business deal between Fazbear Entertainment and Atlus."

The sound of their Hub Producer's name made Adachi a little more on edge as he grabbed the tablet and quickly began looking through them as he let out a Ping trying to let any Looper know he was here, unfortunately he only received one Ping back, one that he was pretty sure was the Phone Guy's elsewhere in the Loop...

"First off, there's Tomoe and Sakuya that you need to deal with, those two tend to travel together and are never far apart from each other, chances are they'll be down the same hallway together one right after the other" Phone Guy said and Adachi quickly moved to shut the door to his right seeing the two Persona-themed animatronics in the right window as Phone Guy continued to speak once the two of them left the hallway and went towards the kitchen...

"Another thing about them that you should be worried about is that the two of them tend to go to the kitchen after a while, because of the way the ventilation system works here, you'll be getting the scents of whatever's cooking in the kitchen which tends to lead to hallucinations and collapsing on the job if you let the two of them loose in the kitchen...so you have to keep them distracted from going into the kitchen by doing several things...First one of the tv's in the employee lounge here is rigged to play action movies like Trial Of The Dragon, Tomoe likes her action movies going and I've rigged a remote to play it" Phone Guy said as Adachi took the mentioned remote and turned it on seeing the tv on the screen begin to play the Kung Fu movie as Tomoe soon dragged Sakuya over to the lounge for them to watch the film.

"Trust me don't let them in the kitchen, it's not pleasant for anyone, for the cooks, for the customers and most importantly here, you" Phone Guy said as Adachi could only nod at hearing that, knowing exactly what Chie and Yukiko were capable of in the kitchen...The first time he saw them make Mystery Food X was something that was imprinted in his mind and could never get out...

"Next is the terrifying threesome of Take, Jiraiya and Izanagi as I refer to them as" Phone Guy said as Adachi quickly looked through the cameras, seeing Jiraiya and Izanagi in a section called the Ninja's Battlefield facing off against a larger version of Take-Mikazuchi as Phone Guy droned, "The three of them tend to stay in position whenever you have the camera on them but if you don't keep an eye on them they'll tend to rush you down in several ways...Either all of them down one hallway, a split between the two hallways, or 1 on each hallway and the third to smash the window" Adachi merely stared at the window of his booth as he had a split second vision of Izanagi crashing through the window and on instinct raised a metal gate to protect the window before Phone Guy said, "As long as the camera is on the three of them, you'll be fine, just don't leave them alone for a while..."

"Finally there's Teddie and Sukona" Phone Guy said and looked across his window at the stage it was opposite to where Teddie and Sukona stood on stage..."Sukona doesn't tend to Awake until the last couple of days in which she will use all of the data gained from the other animatronics and will attempt to get you stuffed in a suit in any way that she can...As for Teddie though, he only moves when the Power runs out so don't run out of power..."

Adachi on the other hand was kept busy looking through all of the cameras there, trying to make sure all of the Animatronics were otherwise occupied....too distracted by this task that he didn't notice one of the posters in the hallway begin to change from a poster of Teddie's Gang before slowly becoming a poster of Magetsu-Izanagi....

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: b-wolf95

Akira hated getting arrested.

While that seems like something that applies to everyone, Akira specifically hated one particular arrest: the one caused by Akechi. While the more severe consequences werepretty much a non-issue, even in Baseline, there was still the drugs and the beating to go through and then there's all the hassle of pretending to be dead afterwards until the heist on Shido's Palace. All and all, it's not a pleasant time.

But, sadly, the only way around that seemed to be to stop Okumura from dying, which required a lot of perpetration and most of the other Phantom Thieves Awake, which meant that in Loops like this where it was just him and Morgana Awake, he was stuck with the arrest. So it should be no surprise that Akira would engage in more insane antics than usual as soon as he got out in such Loops.

Which brings us to Akira's most recent moment of "how is this kid not in a mental hospital yet," which was causing Sojiro to double take so hard, it took him 5 seconds to say "What the...?!"

"Like my outfit?"

"Why are you wearing that?!"

"Well, I'm not supposed to be around and I have to go to the Diet Building at some point, so..."

"Dressed like *that*?!"

"I mean, you can't tell it's me under here."

"Yeah, but you're going to draw way more attention than you would have if you just wore your regular clothes!"

"Come on. Morgana likes it." The cat nodded his head at that statement.

"Morgana is clearly biased here! There is no way for you to justify wearing-!"

"Morning, Boss," Ryuji said as he enter the cafe. "How's Akira do-," it was at that moment that he noticed the scene in front of him and his brain stopped for a moment. "...When did Morgana get so big?"

Akira smirked under the mask of his cat costume. *I think this won't turn out so bad after all.*

[Persona 5], [Sonic the Hedgehog]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

Akira can be seen in cat form, wearing his outfit...as Sonic and his younger counterpart were going through the time doors.

"Surprised?" he asked them.

"It's not our last," Sonic replied with a smirk, his younger counterpart just shrugging. "But yeah, how'd you get involved with this?"

Akira shrugged. "Dunno, but I'm pretty sure we've got a couple rotten eggs to deal with." He then brought out his smart phone. "Although that giant Death Star ripoff with the cannon wasn't there before. Must be their palace."

"A combination of the Space Colony ARK and the Death Egg," Tails said, his younger counterpart arriving. "As if the reference wasn't blatant enough..."

"...Never been on the ARK," Young Tails replied. "At least...not yet, from what the future tells me."

"Stick around for quite a while, and I might teach you how to reverse the polarity of a Chaos Emerald to make a fake one."

Sonic got the idea. "I take it we're going to be entering that thing?" he asked Akira.

"It's their Palace," Akira replied. "And we might get double the treasure. Speaking of, does the other thief know I'm here?"

"Rouge has noticed," Tails answered. "I just met up with her, and she told me to tell you...and I quote, 'Challenge Accepted, Joker.'"

Akira nodded. "Been a while since we had a rival in the thieving business," he said, putting his smart phone in his Pocket. "Let's move."

With that, the five dashed in, unaware of the whole thing being watched by several others in the time abyss.

End of Thread 1 and a snip that wasn't crossposted

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: None of the authors own any of the referenced properties.

Author Notes: This is the chapter that covers the end of the original SMT/Persona loops thread. The final listed snip (the P2/MLP one) was one that was written far earlier but was not crossposted on the original thread. I was able to find it on the thread that absorbed SMT after the first one, but not the original posts. Apparently it's somewhere in MLP comp.

After this chapter the output of SMT/Persona snips drops significantly. Do not expect many future chapters.

[Persona 5], [Undertale]
Another stab-happy kid (title assigned by compiler) – part 1
Author: Garebel
Status: REJECTED

Ann blinked as her younger sibling (they wanted to be referred to as gender-neutral, according to her Loop Memories) for the Loop, suddenly trying to do stuff that they shouldn't do. She did stop them to do things that would be fatal to them though.

"Argh! Where are they?" They yelled out, confusing Ann, but their name soon came to her, she was too busy stopping them to take a closer look, and Ann realized what they meant.

"Chara?" Ann asked her younger sibling, who grabbed a sharp knife and pointed at her.

"Shut up! Where's Asriel!? What did you do to my power of RESETting the timeline?" Chara yelled, confirming Ann's suspicions.

"No, I didn't do anything to both. You can say reality itself is…'broken' for lack of a better term." Ann explained to Chara who dropped the knife in shock.

"No, did my resets erase my home?" Chara asked in Despair. Ann shook her head.

"Nope, I would say displaced would be a better fit for you, right now." Ann explained to Chara, who widen in realization.

"So, they're all right, I'm just in a different world?" Chara asked.

"I reallly don't know all the specifics, but yes." Ann shrugged. "Say, if you don't mind me asking, any likes or dislikes?" She asked.

"Extra Dark Chocolate is one, but I might need to get back to you on the rest of the likes. As for dislikes, White Chocolate is one, don't make me rant about it, but I really HATE People who think they're above the consequences of their actions." Chara growled on that last part. Ann, however, gave a big grin.

"We have plenty of people who think like that on this world…" Ann started, causing Chara to widen their eyes. "But they don't think like that for long…" Ann trailed off. Chara grined at this.

"Do ThEy DiE?" Chara asked, doing his 'melty face'.

"Oh Admins, no!" Ann yelled, confusing Chara into stopping their 'melty face'. "They get their 'desires' stolen, causing them to no longer bear the weight of their actions any more, and wished only to repent." Ann explained. Chara gets shocked at this.

"That actually sounds like a fate worse than death to such people!" Chara yelled out, before smiling. "That sounds like a much greater idea! Where can I learn to do such things?" Chara asked Ann who checked the date and smiled.

"Almost now actually." She said before grabbing an umbrella and dragging Chara out the door with her.

…

(a few minutes later…)

"Aw geez. What's taking them so long? Ryuji asked Akira, who shrugged.

"Wouldn't be surprised if it was Ann, though it could be anyone." Akira commented. He then noticed a new message on his phone. He motioned to Ryuji to check his phone, too.

T.A.: Hey, I'm Awake in both senses! Sorry for the wait.
S.R.: Same, here! What took you so long!? Did that Bastard Kamoshida had a hand in it?
K.A.: Same here, too.
T.A.: Akira, can you smack Ryuji for me? And no, Kamoshida didn't have a hand in this. Found a new Looper, and bringing them over.
S.R.: Ow! Wait, a new Looper? Who is he?
T.A.: 1. They prefer to be referred as gender-neutral.
2. It's Chara from the Dreemer Kingdom Branch.
S.R.: Wait, what!? That murderous psychopath!?
T.A.: They did show signs of being Sucidial, but not killing others. I didn't give them the speech, though.
K.A.: Why are you bringing them, here?
T.A.: They also HATE people who think they're above the consequences of their actions, like Kamoshida.

Ryuji and Akira looked at each other, before Ryuji sighed.

"At this Loop is going to be interesting." Akira tried to cheer up Ryuji without much success.

[Nocturne], [Persona 4]
Dojima's Awakening – epilogue?
Author: Lost Here and There

He floundered around the house. In the back of his head, Kashima sighed.

"Are we doing this or not?"

To his utter annoyance, two more voices emerged from the silence of his mind.

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU FEAR, EPHEMERAL? BEING DENIED? OR IS IT THE VERY SPECTRE OF UNCERTAIN HOPE?

Now, now. It's only natural to fear. Is it not a basic instinct of sentient life? Whatever your resolution, do not forget we will stand with you. For as long as it takes.

Oh, that was it. Arrogant bastards had to play games even here. Ignoring his previous apprehension, Naoki stomped to the door and knocked. It took a minute, but eventually the door opened and a small girl peeked out.

"Oh, eh. Hi. I'm looking for your big brother. Is he in?"

The girl sighed. "He went out for a bit to get dinner. He won't be long. Come in."

Shuffling in, Naoki was shown to the house's small kitchen. Wordlessly, the girl bade him sit, served tea for both, and sat across the half-demon. And stared.

"Um. It's good tea, thanks."

The girl kept staring. Naoki blinked as a possibility occurred to him.

"Oh. I, I should have asked, shouldn't I? Are you… ahem… loopy?"

Leaning back, the girl nodded. "I… wasn't expecting to meeting you like this, I guess. I have something for you."

It was Naoki's turn to sigh. Not the last thing he expected. A cold voice hissed from his shoulder. *LO AND BEHOLD, HERETIC, THINE EVIL REPAID ONCE MORE.*

…I'm sorry, but the freedom to succeed does come with the freedom to fail. As always I endure at your side, if your quest lasts 'til the end of time itself.

Savoring the tea once again, Naoki closed his eyes and braced for whatever was coming. "Go ahead, then."

Click.

"Well? Don't you want it?"

The Demi-Fiend opened his eyes. There was something in the table. Something white and yellow. Pulling the dish close, Naoki stared at the small cake and the colorful bag at the side. And blinked.

On the pastry, bright jelly lines formed two words.

THANK YOU

"Um. Just to make sure. You *do* know who I am, right?"

Chuckling, the girl nodded. "Naoki Kashima. Conception Loop Anchor, asshole lunatic, destined slayer of the multiverse, MLE in potentia, and blah blah blah." Following a tense silence, her smile dulled. A bit. "You have no idea of what you did, do you."

He didn't even try to pretend. "Not the faintest."

The girl gestured towards one of the photos hanging on the wall. "Recognize him?"

Blinking, Naoki focused his memory on the man's factions. "Met him only once, in the Junkyard. He'd been in a big fight; lost control of his demon, got flushed away into the sewers and somehow managed to survive. When he got out, he was still high on adrenaline and scared out of his mind. One of my demons nailed him with a sleep spell; I talked to him afterwards." He squirmed. "I… may have vented a bit at him. Sorry."

The girl nodded. "Believe it or not, it did help him in the long run. Sure, it could have gone a lot better, but I don't want to think how badly it would have gone without you."

"There's a story there."

"Yup. I actually thought you were coming to check on that."

"Sorry, but I actually came to talk to your brother because I've got another problem and he's the expert on voices inside your head."

Nanako raised an eyebrow.

"Look, I already have a separate personality squatting in my brain. Do forgive me if I'm not so hot on the idea of having any more."

"I've heard about the demon. Who are the newcomers?"

Naoki uncomfortably fretted on his seat. "Cut-rate Bowie and Mr. Clean."

Nanako could barely hold back the giggles. "They're on your shoulders, right? The angel and the devil?"

The Demi-Fiend opened his mouth to reply, then froze, vainly trying to force words out as the logic behind the unwelcome presences became clear. At long last he managed a good snort. "Fuck. Fuck. I'm not the only one. Please tell me I'm not the only one."

"You aren't the only one."

•••

And now remember to always smile, thank the cashier for her hard work and add a 15% tip – and don't forget to pick up the etiquette manual from the library on your way home so we can begin practicing.

RIP THE PAGES! TURN THE WORLD INTO A TOILET! STICK OUT YOUR TONGUE!

Yu Narukami hissed, and once again wondered what vengeful deity had set Philemon and Nyarlathotep as his guardian angels for the Loop.

In fact, I have a great idea! Why don't we stay a bit during recess tomorrow so we can practice situational manners with Hanako and Miss Kashiwagi?

REVEL IN OBSCENITY! BREAK SOMEONE'S LEG! PISS IN THE COFFEE POT!

•••

Ryotaro Dojima sipped his coffee as he perused the latest edition of the Daily Planet, and discreetly kept an eye on the Unawake Adachi. An ethereal strongbox buzzed on his left shoulder. He did his best to ignore it, but the words still reached his brain.

killhimalreadywhydoyoupretendyou'rehumanletitoutstopcaringjustdoitdoitDOIT

An irritated, dry voice replied from the other side. *Shaddup, Wolfgang. And you big sodding bloke.* There was a pause. *Good job on keeping the Beast under lock and key. Being your own Watchman, that's the ticket. Policin' could use some work, though.* A match was struck. *Hope you don't mind, can't live without my cigars.*

"Yessir, Mister Vimes."

•••

"...Wait a minute. You knew, didn't you? Who's on your shoulder?"

Nanako smiled. "Now that would be telling."

[Persona 5], [Kingsman]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

Eggsy walked into his home, both sad and angry at unable to stop whoever replaced Charlie from stealing the footage. He entered only to receive a call.

"Good day. Please watch the TV in a few seconds." A person told Eggsy, confusing him, but, cut the call soon after.

"What do they mean?" He asked himself, before going to the living room, seeing his sister watching the TV, and his Mom cooking.

"Ahh, hello, dearie. Was your day good?" She asked him.

"No, not really…" was all Eggsy said, before the TV suddenly started to give off a lot of noise, before, a video played, shocking Eggsy.

It was the stolen footage, the footage of Valentine explaining his full plan was being played in front of his eyes.

When it ended, Eggsy was in Shock, before a voice snapped him out of it.

"Yo, everybody! Did you see this!?" a rough-ish male voice shouted out of the TV.

"*This guy is planning on committing genocide on a world wide scale."* a gentle-ish female voice explained out.

"*While his reasons are good, there's still no excuse for creating such atrocious art."*. A different, cool-ish male voice said.

"*Such an act will not be excused!"* a cold-ish female angrily stated.

"*it's time that he learns that no one cannot protect him."* a calculative female voice stated.

"*not every 'elite' agrees with this guy's plan."* A young-ish female voice spoke out.

"*Indeed, we shall stop such a plan in its tracks!"* a odd voice echoed, unmodulated unlike the other voices.

"*Don't you agree…Leader?"* a faux gentle male voice asked. Suddenly a silhouette of a person appeared on the screen. Eggsy angrily compared it to the person who replaced Charlie in his head. The image changed to an exteme close up of the person, who stepped forward, revealing himself. Eggsy nearly wet his pants in shock. Despite the person wearing a domino mask reminiscent of an eagle, Eggsy recognized the person instantly.

It was Akira, the person who replaced Charlie this time, much to Eggsy's shock.

"Yes! Valentine, by now, you will be hunted. Police all over the world will soon have a list of your allies, who will be captured. This transmission also can't be blocked, either, and is also being broadcast the world over. Your plan is done…" the image soon zoomed out, revealing 8 other people. Every person was silhouetted, except for Akira. "Ruined by us. We are the Phantom Thieves of Heart, and we stole Victory from your grasp." This was the last thing Akira said, before the image changed to a hat and mask with the words 'TAKE YOUR HEART" underneath it, before the TV started to play its original show.

"How, why, when…!?" Eggsy was in severe shock from the message. His phone soon rang, snap him out of it and he answered its call. 'Better not be one of the Kingsmen…' he thought. He was both right and wrong, though.

"Did you enjoy the world wide message we made, Eggsy?" Akira asked Eggsy, whose eyes nearly popped out.

"What's going on? You were supposed to be siding with Valentine, like the person you replaced did?" Eggsy asked, almost loudly, but he forced himself to stay calm as keep the Kingsmen a secret from his mom and sister.

"Replaced…? Tell me, is time repeating for you?" Akira asked. Eggsy's eyes widened in shock.

"How do you know?" He asked.

"Because you're not the only one experiencing these repeats. Look for a brunette girl, riding a grey motorcycle, carrying a black cat with green eyes near Big Ben. She's a friend of mine, and can lead you to me. Let's just the explanation is way too long to speak on the phone." Akira explained before the call ended. Eggsy rubbed his head.

'I get the feeling this is going to be one heck of a day.' He thought to himself.

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
Sojiro's Awakening
Author: Garebel

Soijro blinked as he looked around & frowned. His memories were all jumbled up. one set was him living in Tokyo, but another set claimed this 'Inaba' was his home. He currently living with two people, Sakura Nanako (who was related to him by blood, despite he never married) & Narukami Yu, who was his nephew, (but he never had any brothers or sisters.)

"Sakura-san?" A voice grabbed Sojiro's attention while he was slamming his head on the head. He rationally thought he didn't know this guy, but his mind told him, he knows this 'Tohru Adachi'.

"Adachi, I need a few stiff drinks." Sojiro told Adachi, thought sounding more like an order. 'I can't deal with this sort of thing, now.' he thought. Adachi nodded before walking off.

'Something's up with him.' Adachi thought as he shifted though his Pocket before pulling out a bottle of cheap sake, which he modified a bit of that truth serum from Hogwarts. He did acted UnAwake at the time of getting the serum, but afterwards...Adachi shook his head. 'Now is not the time!' he thought, before he entered Sojiro's office.

"Thanks, Adachi." Sojiro said, before he drank the entire thing. He then moved weirdly.

'Huh...oops!' Adachi thought, relizing the 'Sake' was actually the sort of thing that would make a person drunk in four shots. "Geez..." he muttered angrily. but before Sojiro knock

himself out, Adachi heard him say one word.

"Futaba..." Adachi froze when he heard that word. His own mind began to work almost a mile a minute, before he arrived at his conclusion.

"Well, S**t! Those two are not going to be happy!" Adachi growled to himself, before lifting Sojiro & moving him to his car. On the way, Adachi found the reception area of the station.

"Hey, can you please tell the Chief, that Sakura-san is going to need a few days off? If he asks why, tell him Adachi gotten way too much clumsy, today." He asked a police officer, who nodded. "Thanks." Adachi said before leaving the station, and bring Sojiro to his car. Once on the road, Adachi sighed. "I'm glad that 'Clumsy Adachy' is enough to cover and mistakes I made.'

[Persona 5], [Sonic the Hedgehog]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

A wolf mobian was tossing a Phantom Ruby up and down, looking into the sunset in the meantime.

"Yo!" Sonic chimed in, sitting beside the wolf. "That was a cool move you did, back there. I didn't expect you to shot the sun to bits like that." He complimented the wolf who smiled.

"Well, I took down a god with that move, so a sun would no big deal." The wolf stated, amused at himself.

"Really? If it weren't that this Loop is ending, I would like to hear about your baseline!" Sonic said, impressed.

"Well, see ya next Loop! Hope you will enjoy a Last Surprise I made." The wolf said, before he launch his grapple hook and swung away, after pocketing the Phantom Ruby Prototype. Sonic blinked at the last line, before realizing who it really was.

"See ya Later…'Joker'!" Sonic said knowingly before running off.

…

(Next Loop, Tokyo)

Akira blinked Awake on the train he always rode, into Tokyo on. He leaned back in his seat, before he Pinged. He blinked in surprise when he got 9 pings back, one more than usual. He frowned at the implications, before he arrived at his stop and walked to LeBlance's cafe, already knowing that Sojiro was going to be there.

He didn't expect Sojiro to be cleaning a gun, though!

Akira's glasses tilled to the side, he wasn't sure what was going on with Sojiro. His answer came though, when Sojiro looked at him and a Ping was let loose. Akira quickly put the

pieces together and facepalmed.

"You're Looping, now Boss?" Akira asked Sojiro who nodded.

"Yep, Yu and most of his group give me the Speech since I apparently replaced a guy called Dojima Ryutaro." He explained. "Though I got an odd Persona, though. When it evolved, it became Kohryu, and…what's so funny!?" Sojiro yelled at Akira who was laughing at this bit.

"It's just…Kohryu seems to always be the Ultimate Persona of the Hierophant Arcana. And I do have the ability to summon Kohryu, too." Akira explained after calming down from his crazy fit. Sojiro blushed at this, & looked away in embarrassment. Sojiro shook his head after a few minutes.

"Anyway, think you can help me practice?" He asked Akira who nodded, before removing a jewel from his pocket.

"Yes, I can." Was all Akira said, before activating the Phantom Ruby Prototype.

[Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

Sojiro blinked as he walked into his home and saw Futaba and an alien like creature talking back and forth.

"*Offer's always open!"* The creature told Futaba, who just nodded.

"Once I get more experience from the Loops, Sure. Just expect to always be wary." Futaba said. The creature then shrugged.

"*Given our reputation, I'm not surprised, there. See Ya!"*. The creature said before disappeared.

"Futaba! Are you Ok!?" Sojiro yelled out running to Futaba, before giving her a hug.

"I'm fine, Sojiro!" Futaba said, calming him down. "That was actually Cthulhu." She revealed.

"Oh, are you going…!?" Sojiro asked, before Futaba interrupted.

"Nope, I'm fine. All he did was a list of Jobs, for me to do." She told Sojiro, who frowned.

"I thought guys like him are supposed to make people insane…". He revealed, frowning.

"Apparently, having the Necronomicon as a Persona cancels out that effect. Futaba said, shrugging.

[Persona 5], [Undertale]
Another stab-happy kid – parts 2 and 3
Author: Garebel
Status: REJECTED

Akira growled, everything was processing smoothly, until Shadow Kamoshida managed to capture Chara. He scowled at the Monsterious form that Shadow Kamoshida took on as he blocked all incoming attacks, thanks to Satanael's Zenith Shield Skill. He and the other Phantom Thieves, Morgana being Awake when they rescued him, couldn't do anything else as long as Kamoshida threatened to kill Chara, if they did anything else.

Chara cried as he looked on. 'This is all my fault! If I wasn't careless…" They thought to themselves.

Ann growled. She had enough of this. She quickly summoned Hecate
but Shadow Kamoshida noticed this and moved Chara to in front of Ann.

"Chara, are you really alright with this!?" Ryuji yelled angrily. "Do you really want to lose this chance? We didn't let you see it…"

"Skull…!" Morgana tried to stop Ryuji to say it, but He glared at Morgana, before turning back to Chara.

"That bastard Kamoshida tried to force himself on Ann & caused her best friend, Shiho, to commit suicide! If we don't stop him here, what's going happened to Asriel, if Kamoshida finds them!? Toriel, & Asgore, too!?" Ryuji yelled at Chara, who's eyes widened.

'Don't give up, Chara!' Toriel's voice echoed in Chara's head.

'You're the hope of the entire Underground!' Asgore's voice echoed, too, along with…

'Chara, please don't do this…!' Asriel's Voice, and then an evil laugh not from Kamoshida, but…

'**Gahahahahahahahahahaha!'** Chara reeled in shock, at Flowey's laugh, before growling…

"Kamoshida…You're the worst bastard of all time, no…worse! Even true bastards would reel at the sight of you!" Chara yelled out in anger at Shadow Kamoshida who reeled back in shock, before growling.

"WeLl, TiMe FoR yOu To DiE!" Shadow Kamoshida said, before Chara pulled out a knife and tried to stab Kamoshida. Unlike the other times in this Loop, where it would pass though a Shadow…

"ARGH!" It actually hurt Shadow Kamoshida who dropped Chara as a result. Ann took the chance and caught Chara before hitting the ground. She then ran back to her other fellow Thieves. Ann then carefully placed Chara in a standing position.

"What the hell!?" Ryuji exclaimed as he saw Shadow Kamoshida reel back in pain. "How did he…!?" Ryuji started to ask only for his question to be answered.

"*Finally, 'tis time."* a voice mirroring Chara's own echoed in their head. Chara then held their head in pain with their eyes now a pale yellow. *"You, who hath committed terrible sins, now have a new chance. Become the hidden Jugde and punish those who hath committed similar sins, but without regrets. Protect those who couldn't! I, too in life, committed the same sins, but I payed for them in the end. You, who is but a child,*
shall receive my power, so that you will not follow my same path! I am Thou, Thou art I! The contract is sealed! Now, rip and tear thou enemies till they ***REPENT!***". At the last word, Chara looked straight up at Kamoshida, revealing a mask, that look like it was made from theater masks that express anger and determined.

"Yes. Kamoshida! It's time for you to be judged for your crimes!" Chara yelled before ripping off their mask, blood spilling out as though they removed their own skin, and then engulfed in a blue pillar of light.

"Huff…huff…". Chara breath out, his outfit completely different. He now wore a grey hoodie with a dot with two wings, one on each side, flying over three triangles, one of them upside down, etched into the shirt. Their arms was bare but with tattoos that look to be on fire, one of their hands holding a trident. Their legs had armor on them, but worn in such a way that makes it so that it won't make any noise while still offering protection. Their Persona floated behind them. It was wearing a black cloak in a way that hid all but it's 'head' and a hand. The hand was actually machine-like with the 'fingers' being actual knifes. The 'head' was actually a faceless darkness, with a line of masks, each showing a different emotion, line around the shoulders with a neutral mask being worn.

"YoU lItTle BaStArD, yOu DaRe HaRm Me!?" Shadow Kamoshida yelled at Chara, who just smiled.

"Oh, I dare alright. And We will dare steal your Treasure! Let's show him…" Chara commanded his new Persona, who opened their cloak, revealing a mechanical body that hides the Persona's gender and the second hand that also have blade for fingers, & legs that ended in four knifes each, three in the front, one in the back. "…**JACK THE RIPPER**!"

…

Chara lended back on Akira's couch. They and Akira were spending time, together.

"Heh, to be honest, I thought you were joking when you said we'll be going after a politician." Chara admited, thinking back to Shido's Place. "I'm starting to think that we may actually kill a god like you said."

"Well, It was an experience one never tends to forget." Akira admitted.

"Said the guy who did it multiple times." Chara countered, with both They and Akira devolving into laughter. "Still, I'm surprised that we changed a person without the Metaverse." They said, referring to Sae.

"It all worked out though." Akira told Chara.

"To be honest, I actually hated Humanity. I thought that there were only people who exploited others, & people who get exploited." Chara admitted, before turning to Akira. "I never thought that there were others who hated the same thing." They said.

"You likely didn't try to connect with them." Akira pointed out.

"That's true…Akira, thanks." Chara said. "Humanity is really more complex then I thought. I'm going have to learn about what they're really like." Chara smiled.

Inside their heart is a different matter entirely. Jack the Ripper became engulfed in a bright light. When it faded, Jack the Ripper was gone. In its place was a man wearing a mix of men & women's clothing. The legs were plant-like and was holding a weapon that was a mix of a trumpet & a gun, with a bayonet at the tip.

Jack the Ripper has given rise to Barbartos.

"Incredible…" Chara breathed out in shock, feeling their Persona evolved.

"Let's make sure this country doesn't get ruined." Chara told Akira who nodded.

[Persona 5], [Spyro the Dragon]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

Spyro looked ready to throw up. All he did teach his new apprentice, how he used magic. He didn't expect the Sorceress to be trapped in a gas chamber with gas that causes her to throw up her own innards, and killing her slowly from the inside out. He turned his apprentice.

"Ok, I know what she was going to was evil, but you shouldn't be allowed to go this far! What were you thinking?" He yelled out at his apprentice, showing signs of anger, shock, and fear in his face.

"Well, I did see my mom get murdered, in a way that makes look like suicide in Baseline…" Spyro flinched at that. "…and the fact that I was on the verge of killing myself over the guilt of me being the 'reason' why my mom took her life, that thing's plan hit WAY too close to home for me." His apprentice explained to him, causing Spyro to frown. He lifted a wing over his apprentice's body.

"Alright, I understand now, but please, Futaba, don't pull a stunt like this again…". Spyro told his apprentice, who nodded.

"Of course…" Futaba said.

…

Next Loop, Futaba and Spyro were laughing at the rest of the Thieves, including Akechi.

"Well, I didn't expect this." Akechi plainly stated, his voice neutral in a way that indicated he didn't know either to be angry or join in on the laugher.

"At least, we don't have to worry about food for today." Yusuke commented, removing the pie tin from his face and licking it.

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
(no title)
Author: Garebel

"Wow…" Ryuji stated, dumbfounded. Ann was giving an evil grin, while Makoto was stared. Akira turned to the new transfer student.

"How much did you two plan this?" Akira asked Yosuke who smiled.

"Well, we managed to find evidence to show, while Yu gave him that Omnipotent Orb. You seeing the results." Yosuke said montioning to the recorded video.

Mr. Morooka, aka King Moron, was unleashing his infamous rants on Kamoshida, who tried to shut him with physical harm, but the Omnipotent Orb basically stopped that, and allowed Morooka to continue his rant.

[Persona 2]
Jun's Awakening – part 1
Author: me. HelenTheMoon (Lermis)

Again.

Tatsuya found himself holding his katana in a white-knuckled grip, facing again a King Leo whose face was unmarred holding Jun in a chokehold.

Even though he had looked for him before everything else.

Again.

Even though he had gotten Maya off the shrine in time.

Again.

Even if he avoided meeting everyone.

Again.

Even though he had crossed Sides a thousand times.

Again.

The same scene. The same fire. The exact same situation. Maya wasn't here just yet but other than that...

Somewhere, "He" was laughing. Tatsuya knew that.

Once again, Tatsuya Sudou handed to Jun the flower.

"Remember that day...?"

Tatsuya was about to shout words that had become instinctive at this point, "His" brand pulsing and eating away his skin. To tell him to forget everything...

"As a matter of fact, I DO remember".

And in complete defiance of all odds, Jun Kashihara - no, *Kurosu* - dropped the flower in his captor's eye.

The result was exactly what in another world he'd have expected. Tatsuya barely caught a glimpse of the man's bloody eye socket before he fell.

The sword slipped off his grip.

"...Jun?"

And at the sight of the boy's smile, one that haunted his days and nights along with so many others, Tatsuya felt a silver of something he had forgotten about.

"I haven't seen Big Sis Maya around so I suppose we should take the children before she arrives. Shall we?"

Hope.

[Persona 5], [Call of Duty: Zombies]
(no title)
Author: Awesomedude17

"You Awake, Richtofen?" Ultimis Dempsey asked.

"What is it, Dempsey?"

"I just realized something."

"What?"

"There is endless universes, and endless Loops."

"And?"

"So that means that there's a Loop where a bunch of high schoolers summon Satan to shoot God in the face to save Christmas."

"Absurd," Ultimis Richtofen paused and then sighed in resignation, "But very possible."

"Right?"

Igor blinked as he felt like someone summarized what he just witnessed the Phantom Thieves of Heart's latest actions fairly accurately.

He summarily brushed it with a sense of pride as watched Momentos and the real world separate.

[Persona 2], [My Little Pony]
(no title)
Author: Gamerex27

Twilight rubbed at her snout. "Right...explain...explain what's up with your part of the Loop, again?"

"Nyarlathotep casts a curse on Sumaru City that makes rumors become reality," the mare in front of her, here named Hopeful Heart, said. "No matter how crazy it is, or how impossible, if enough people believe it, it becomes true."

"That...that sounds *incredible!*" Twilight whispered to herself, her tea having long since grown cold. "Imagine all the *possibilities you could do!* Experiments with dimensional technology without crashing the Loop! So many new fields of magic you can create with just a few words! So-"

"It also caused the Nazis to resurrect themselves in the city, and for Maya to get killed, fulfilling a rumored prophesy that the world would be destroyed," her companion, a brown-coated pegasus, here called Hot Ride (to his chagrin) told the Anchor.

Twilight abruptly stopped mid-sentence, as she went over the implications of this curse again. "Oh. It's...it that dangerous?"

"It can't do anything to Yggdrasil, since no one in town knows about it," the stallion said. "You'd need to spread a rumor about the Tree for anything to happen at all. Still, Masakado slapped a Read-Only label on it, just to be safe."

"Tatsuya..." Maya said, sighing. "You're over-reacting again. I don't think the curse could do anything to Yggdrasil at all: it's not powerful enough."

"You can never be too sure," Tatsuya replied. "Still, that thing usually follows us around wherever we end up in the Loops."

"Which is why you tried to spread a rumor saying that the Pies sold weapons in this bakery along with food and drinks," Twilight said. She waved her forehoof, gesturing around the ordinary-looking cafe. "Yeah, I don't think that's ever gonna hap-"

"Here you go."

Before Twilight could finish her sentence, Maud Pie wheeled up a silver platter on a dessert cart to them. Grabbing the top of the tray in her mouth, she lifted off the cover to reveal, not food, but a stash of weapons.

"What," the Princess of Friendship simply said.

"One katana modified for wing use," Maud continued, hoofing it over to Tatsuya, "one pair of hoof-mounted pistols," giving these to Maya, "and one military-grade horn enhancer," she finished, dropping the sharpened metal casing next to Twilight's slice of pie.

"*What.*"

"Thank you!" Maya said, sliding the guns onto her hooves.

"By the way," Maud said, as she reached for the other tray, distributing the groups' lunches, "I heard that the gates to Tartarus broke open and demons are running loose everywhere. It'd explain why so many places were on fire lately."

Twilight's face turned a little pale, and she facehoofed.

"Don't worry," Maud said, as emotionless as ever. "It's just a rumor."

With that, she cantered back to the kitchen.

"See what I mean?" sighed Tatsuya. "Guess we better get on it. After lunch, I guess."

"By the way," Maya asked as they dug into their food, "I *did* hear some more Pings other than you before. Do you think your friends know about the curse?"

"I can only hope not," Twilight said, in between bites of her hay burger.
"Ginkophyta *knows* what they'd do with it."

"Ah *really* hate ta' do this," Applebloom muttered, "but...ya said rumors are becomin' reality?"

"Yes," Twilight told the Cutie Mark Crusaders, "even the *really* dangerous ones. And what's the best way to get information out?"

"...Internet?" Scootaloo asked.

"Doesn't exist in our Loop."

"Newspapers?" she tried again.

"Exactly," Twilight said, nodding. "I need you girls to start up the Gabby Gums column again, so that we can get the good rumors out and discredit the bad ones."

"Basically, you need to be our rumormongers, too," Tatsuya added. "Tell us what you hear off the streets, so we can know which ones to spread. Maya's a journalist in Baseline, she'll help you find a big publisher."

"Got it!" Sweetie Belle's eyes glinted, and the Cutie Mark Crusaders huddled up.

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS RUMORMONGERS, YAAAAAAAY!"

…

Author: Evilhumour

A few seconds later, there was a mighty *THUD* as one of Twilight's window exploded, as a rainbow mess known as Rainbow Dash crashed into her home again.

Frowning, Twilight reached to get her squirt bottle and newspaper when the pile groaned.

"Uuugh, sorry Twily," her friend whimpered, clutching something in her hooves. "But I *really* need your help."

"What's wrong Dash?" Twilight started to run towards her when Dash started to twitch and held up a hoof so quickly that there was a sonic boom inside her home. Thankfully, Twilight's magic was quicker.

"Rumor around I'm the fastest there is," Dash groaned, rolling over onto her side, clutching a bucket to her chest. "And anytime someone moves, *I* move faster." That was as far as Dash got before filling the bucket with her lunch. "I cannot believe I am saying this, but I am going *way* too fast," Dash whimpered, her mouth still deep inside. "*Please* tell me you have *something* your lab that can help me."

Twilight nodded her head, and responded in the affirmative as she used her magic to slowly carry Rainbow Dash down the stairs and into a special sensor depriving bubble with the promise of soup, blankets and clean buckets for the mare suffering motion sickness.

…

Author: Bliss Authority

Pinkie scratched her chin. "So that rumor about Discord bringing the Smooze to the Grand Galloping Gala-"

"-is a FANTASTIC idea!" Discord grabbed her fetlock and shook it vigorously before swimming off through the air. "Thanks, Pinkie!"

Tatsuya just glared at Pinkie.

…

Author: Harosata

"Hold on! I need to check a rumor!" Pinkie dashed out of the house.

Tatsuya looked around the room.

"I'm back!"

"Gah!" Tatsuya picked himself up from the floor. "Pinkie, where did you go?"

"Oh, I heard a rumor that I show up when someone makes a Pinkie Promise, so I just had to show up and see if that's true." Pinkie explained.

"A Pinkie...Promise?" Tatsuya tried to decipher what Pinkie said. "Wait, if you show up at a place you're rumored to show up, isn't that a self-fulfilling prophecy?"

"Hm, you could be right. I'll check that rumor again!" And Pinkie ran out of the house again. Tatsuya blinked and turned his attention to Twilight.

"Earlier, I did hear rumors that your friend is a bit...funny."

"It's actually a fact."

...

Author: BIOS-Pherecydes

Twilight was *really* starting to hate this Loop. It had seemed like a simple trip to the market until she had noticed the empty streets, only then recalling the issues that the residents of Ponyville had with Zecora before getting to know her. Combined with Nyarlathotep's curse it had resulted in the sight in front of her.

Directing a swarm of Parasprites and surrounded by ominously moving shadows the Zebra mare stalked forward, her cloak moving in a non-existent wind. However before Twilight could move to cut off the apparent threat she was distracted by a hit from the Element of Generosity from directly in front of her. Relaxing, she gave a rueful grin and went to greet her friend.

"Hey Zecora, how are you? Uh... other than the whole witch thing I mean."

"Hello Twilight, I am doing quite well
Although this Loop is rather odd, as I'm sure you can tell."

Twilight nodded agreement. "So do you want me to try and counter the rumors going around about you?"

Zecora smiled, but shook her head.

"Thank you but no, as there is no need
I am quite enjoying being the Witch of Everfree.
The Parasprites are of an unexpected aid
And there are many new potions I wish to have made."

As if to illustrate her point the swarm of replicating creatures returned at that moment, each loaded with various items from the surrounding shops.

"... I hope you remembered to pay for those."

…

"The reputation of Team Garash echoes far and wide, its leader a cake of spirit, a kick-crust paragon of glucose density! Dig the crumbs out of your wrappers because I've got something to say! He takes the blazing oven in his bare hands and endures the searing heat. A desserts dessert sustained by strength of will. When you hear of the great Kamina Muffin they're talking about me! You'd best remember that! Who the hell do you think you are? Isn't your whisk the one that will pierce the heavens, the earth, and through to tomorrow? Go beyond the impossible and kick reason to the curb! That's how Team Garash rolls! Don't forget. Believe in yourself. Not in the you who believes in me. Not the me who believes in you. Believe in the you who believes in yourself. Giga Pudding Breaker!

As the small army of desserts crashed a hole in the roof of Sugarcube Corner, Bright Eyes and Pinkie gave each other surprised looks. This was not what they expected when they started spreading those rumors about magical cakes being the source of Celestia's power.

…

Author: Evilhumour

"Luna, *stop* laughing, and get me the *BUCK* out of here!" Celestia shouted, placing her hooves on the side of her throne and tried again to lift herself upright.

Luna shook her head, still laughing to herself. "Dear sister, if *anything*, this should serve as a wake up call to your cake addiction."

Celestia simply flailed her hooves in the air, trying to reach her sister's body, her wide flanks still wedge into her throne.

…

Author: BIOS-Pherecydes

It was times like this that Twilight really wished she had fingers, so that she could try and ease the migraine she was certain she could feel forming. Standing in front of her were two familiar forms, one of whom most certainly *hadn't* been part of the Loop previously.

"Let me see if I've got this right. You-" she said pointing at the normal pony Lyra "somehow managed to start a rumor with the voices in your own head and thanks to the nature of your glitch it actually caused Yggdrasil to set up a Mikasa Glitch mid-Loop."

Lyra nodded sheepishly.

"Right. Which explains the fact we now have your human self running around the middle of Ponyville, and cedar knows how we're supposed to explain that."

The aforementioned human blushed and awkwardly rubbed the back of her head with a laugh, inadvertently causing a mild panic from the spectating ponies at the sight of her incisors.

Twilight's felt her mane begin to frazzle and her eye begin to twitch, before taking a calming breath and turning around.

"You know what, you figure it out."

Ignoring the protests from the duplicated Looper, she headed off to find something to calm her nerves.

'I need to find something to read. I wonder if I can start a rumor that Daring Do has a new book coming out tomorrow.'

…

Author: Evilhumour

"Lyra!" Dash shouted, rolling over the purple unicorn. "Get your seapony self under control!"

"Hehe!" the mint green mare chuckled to herself, using the bubble as part of her large, *weird* bicycle made half with water and half of the magical bubble holding the rainbow mare. "Shoo bee doo, this is *so* much fun!"

…

Author: Harosata

"I'm back. Twilight!"

"Ga- I should stop doing that." Tatsuya grumbled as he looked at Pinkie. "Did you find anything useful?"

"Well, I heard some rumors, but I don't think they have anything to do with whatever's spreading the rumors. Let's see..." Pinkie began to count the incidents on her hoof. "There's a rumor that Trixie defeated an Ursa Major, a rumor that the Flim-Flam brothers make the best cider, a rumor where Celestia is pulling all the strings in Ponyville, a rumor that Cheese throws the best party..."

Tatsuya snapped to attention. "Wait, what was that part?"

"I don't believe it either. I mean, I'm the reason he's a party thrower in the first pl-"

Tatsuya shook his head. "The part about Celestia pulling the string."

Pinkie blinked. "What's so interesting about that?"

"Look, if she's pulling the strings, either she's controlling the power behind these rumors or she's using the effects of these rumors for her own gain." Tatsuya started to head out. "Either

way, it's worth checking."

"Not really." Applebloom said as she popped in, her bow occasionally tugging in the direction of Canterlot. "If you happen to see Rarity, you probably don't want her to see her boutique."

…

Authors: Gamerex27, wildrook

Maya cantered down the street, mentally reviewing the notes from her latest interview.

She stopped in place, then backpedaled, tripping over her clumsy four legs in the process.

Looking up, she could see a *very* annoyed Rarity, hanging by a gigantic spiderweb-esque structure covering her boutique. It twitched constantly, as if drawn by a magnet. Her makeup was running down her face, as if she had been crying, but it was dry when Maya galloped over to her.

"Aren't you usually the type to scream about this?" Maya asked.

"I did," Rarity said, hoarsely. "For several *hours*. But everypony was too worried about that zebra from the Everfree to leave their homes and *help me*." The Unawake mare dramatically sighed. "Oh, for a brave stallion to come to my rescue. Or anypony, really."

"I'm afraid I'll have to do," Maya said. "Give me a second. *PERSONA!*"

Again, she summoned Artemis in a burst of light. But a mere second after she did so, she began to consider exactly *how* a frightened and stressed mare would react to seeing somepony summon a ten-foot tall, white, hairless minotaur out of nowhere to tear everything near her to shreds.

Rarity tried to scream, but found that she just didn't have the voice for it anymore. "*Where's my fainting couch when you need it?!"*

Several minutes later, a disgruntled Rarity hobbled down from the window, gently eased down by the Goddess of the Moon. As Artemis vanished, she swayed in place, then clutched at her nose with a hoof. "My word!" she said. "What...what is that revolting smell?!"

Maya sniffed at the air, and instantly mirrored Rarity's action as she recognized the very distinctive smell. "But...that's impossible," she choked out, as her eyes started to water. "Only the Inaba girls should be able to make that!...Did someone spread a rumor to make their cooking worse?!"

Eventually, the mares had staggered their way over to the Golden Oaks Library, staring down the sheepish Cutie Mark Crusaders.

"I know Sweetie Belle's cooking was bad," Rarity growled, "but that odor is REVOLTING! What were you three trying to cook?!"

"Curry," Apple Bloom muttered.

Tatsuya and Maya cringed.

"You didn't," the red stallion muttered.

"That confirms it," Maya sighed. "Right...Tatsuya, could you find some other pegasi to make a storm to blow that smell away? It's bad enough dealing with our usual curse: no need to add Mystery Food X to it all."

…

Author: Evilhumour

"On one hoof, I am *really* angry at you for getting that gossip out, Dash," Twilight muttered at the bubble where the sick mare was slowly recovering, drinking the soup that Pinkie Pie made for her. The rest of their friends were trying poorly not to laugh, with Dash too ill to do so. "To the point I am *tempted* to roll you around town, or start a rumor that you always dress in style."

Twilight 'sighed', 'looking' at the bubble. "On the other hoof, I cannot do it as it would be *really* mean and I cannot do it because I don't have an ELM body anymore!" the purple egg shouted, wobbling angrily, causing the mares around her to laugh out loud. Apparently, rumors that had been put through a round of Chinese Whispers/Broken Telephone worked as well in this loop.

…

Author: wildrook

"Well, I'm not exactly the one walking on eggshells here, Sheldon Sparkle," Rainbow Dash replied, too ill to make a wittier retort.

"'Sheldo-the chick stuck in his egg from that one farm Loop?" Spike asked. "That was *eons* ago: no one's going to remember that!"

Twilight rolled away and looked at Tatsuya on the sofa.

"You're in my spot," she said. "Best incubation area."

…

Author: Evilhumour

"Where is Pinkie Pie?!" Luna thundered in the middle of Ponyville. "We have traced the source of the rumor that our moon is made of cheese to her, and We wish to have words with her!"

Said mare simply stayed in the background, nomming the stolen moon cheese with a grin on her face.

…

Author: Harosata

Looking at the time, Maya remembered a rumor that she had heard. "Luna? Are you awake?"

The Moon Princess gazed up. "Hm? I am. What do you need to ask of me?"

Maya looked at her from many angles. "Just how are you awake?"

"Is this a trick question?" Luna had to ask.

Tatsuya studied the princess. "Now that you mention it, she is awake."

Twilight looked back and forth. "Okay, what are you guys talking about?"

"Princess Luna sleeps during the day, and yet she has gone to investigate the rumors around the princesses." Maya explained. "Princess Luna, how did you make yourself immune to that rumor?"

"Well, it is simple. When one thinks of the day, they think of the sun, which is controlled by my sister Celestia." Luna explained as she pointed at the bright ball in the sky. "And so, I merely place my moon into the sky even if Celestia does not move her sun..."

"And they think it's night even when the sun is out!" Twilight realized the logic. "Or at least nopony knows what to call that sort of time of the day. But still, I'm surprised you found that loophole, Luna. How did you think up the solution?"

Luna blushed. "To be truthful, Izzzzzzzzzzz..." THUD!

Maya poked the fallen princess. "Princess? She's asleep."

"Huh. Guess there's no need to see if that rumor is true." Twilight concluded. "But for the rumor to take effect, something must have happened to the moon..."

"But what?" Tatsuya asked.

"Urp!"

"Ergh...Okay, that's getting old." Tatsuya frowned as he turned to Pinkie, who had a lot of cheese crumbs on her mouth.

…

Author: Evilhumour

Cadence blinked as she watched Blueblood hold the door for the next mare that passed by, humming an innocent tune as he gave a generous tip to the beggar on the street.

"Okay..." Shining said slowly, watching the scene with his wife. "I don't know what's worse; the rumor that Blueblood being an *actual* prince charming is working or the fact seeing him

act so *good* is so disturbing."

"Me neither dear," Cadence muttered as he began to lead away Octavia away, charming the mare. "But I think Vinyl is going to be a bit mad to find out he stole her date."

Shining scoffed and rolled his eyes, "Well, it wouldn't be Blueblood if he didn't do something jerkish, even when he is behaving himself."

…

Author: Masterweaver

"Oh mah leaves."

Scootaloo leaned in the door. "What is it, Apple Bloom?"

The earth pony just shook her head and hoofed over the newspaper. On the front page, Cadance was giving the camera an awkward smile as she wrapped one hoof around Filthy Rich, and Diamond Tiara stood in front of her practically beaming with glee. 'Local Stallion locates long-lost daughter!' the headline blared, with 'Local filly actually a princess!' right below it.

Scootaloo stared at the paper in shock. "...Diamond started this rumor, didn't she?"

"She's a decent social manipulator, when she puts her mind to it."

The pegasus bit her lip. "...you know, uh... if she were *awake* I wouldn't suggest this, but... what if we pitched an article about Filthy Rich loving Screwball?"

…

Author: BIOS-Pherecydes

Angel Bunny wasn't sure whether to be please or irritated with the current Loop. On the one paw he now received the respect he deserved from the weak ponies his owner insisted on dealing with on a daily basis. On the other paw the current rumor around Ponyville was that he was secretly a Demon and Fluttershy had accidentally bound him to her service during a trip into the Everfree.

Eh, whatever, he decided as he roasted a carrot-kabob with a quick burst of Hellfire.

…

Author: Harosata

Pinkie hopped over to Fluttershy's for a quick visit, though if she were anypony else, the Ursa Majors in the backyard should have been an indicator.

"So...you can't talk because everypony says you're that one quiet pony."

Nod

"And you didn't fly to Twilight's because they also say that you don't?"

Nod

Pinkie flipped through a notebook. "And they also say you're a vampire pony, you become a raging beast if someone even hurts a dragonfly, and you have a cockatrice's stare. Is that true?"

Nod

"Huh, that explains the blindfold. I thought that was part of your dragon wrestling costume."

…

Author: Gamerex27

As Maya sat on Twilight's egg, she heard a knock at the door. Turning around, she summoned her Persona Artemis in a burst of blue light, opening the door to reveal a diamond dog with a fiery red coat, looking confused.

"Hi, Sunset," Twilight muttered. "You Awake?"

"If I wasn't, I'd still be at Canterlot High," she said, smiling. "But...what's up with the whole 'rumors magically coming true' thing? I figured out pretty quickly what was going on, and I..." she shifted in place. "I spread a rumor that the Dazzlings couldn't *really* sing, and had to lip synch all of their music. Next thing I know, all of their magic stops working and I've solved the problem before it even started."

"That...that's actually pretty clever," Twilight said, chuckling. "As for what's going on...some entity from these guys' Loop put a curse on Ponyville and Canterlot that makes rumors become reality. And since the portal is *in*Canterlot..."

"...it extends to Canterlot High, too." Sunset concluded. "So, uh...why am I a diamond dog and not a pony? I *remember* being a pony in my Loop memories before I first went through the mirror."

"I've...seen the show-the backup of your universe in the Hub-with Jun," Tatsuya admitted. "Up to the first half of season 4, at least. And they use human curses there, right?"

"Uh...they don't show it in the backup, since it's aimed at foals, but yes..." Sunset trailed off.

"So, if there were rumors about you being a bitch-"

"They came true," Sunset Shimmer said, facepawing. "Not sure why I was still human on the Other Side, then," she mused, not noticing how Tatsuya twitched at that phrase, "but it makes sense. Mostly."

"So, is the curse coming from this side, or your side?" Twilight asked, being unable to see how Tatsuya twitched again.

"This side, I think," Sunset replied. "I mean, it was strong enough on the other side, but I think the source is coming from this side-"

"Can we PLEASE STOP TALKING about *this side* and the *other side?!*" Tatsuya snapped.

The egg and the dog stopped talking, and looked at Tatsuya.

"It...bad memories," he said, sighing. "Should we ask the Crusaders to see if they can find the source of the curse?"

"They're not *that* magically inclined," Twilight told them. "It would be best if Sunset and I looked for it with you guys. At least, when I FINALLY BUCKING HATCH!" she screamed, shaking in place as Maya's body heat still failed to get her out of the egg. "Tatsuya, some fire would be NICE!"

…

Author: Gamerex27, Evilhumour

"Soooooo," Scootaloo started, as she pulled some notes out of her saddlebag with her wing. "Rumors. What have you girls got today?"

"There's the rumor that Celestia is coming to make a personal investigation into all this craziness," Sweetie Belle told them. "Personally, I think we should run it: it'd help get her out of that 'all Celestia's cakes go *right* to her flanks' rumor Luna made that's got her stuck in her throne."

"'Kay, that's one," Scootaloo said, jotting it down. "What else?"

"There's the rumor that AJ is a stallion in disguise..." Applebloom started.

Before she could say anything else, she was cut off by a loud, *very* masculine scream from the direction of the Apple farm.

"...annnnnd it looks like it kicked in," she finished. "That's something Ah'd *like* to counter, but we've got bigger problems now. Put it on the list, but low priority."

"Speaking of that," Scootaloo added, "there's also a rumor about your family switching from growing apples to oranges.

An even louder, angrier scream came from the farm.

"...sh-he-whatever-is less upset about a gender shift than her crops changing?" Tatsuya asked, confused.

"'S a matter of pride," Applebloom said, grinding her teeth.

"Big Mac, once Ah get my hooves on ya, Ah *SWEAR* Ah'll buck *you* into being a mare!" the stallion with three oranges cutie mark shouted, chasing after he-er, *his* grinning big brother, past Twilight's window.

"We need to fix that, pronto," Applebloom added. "Otherwise, the family reunion comin' up soon will turn into a *riot*."

"Got it," the pegasus said, writing that down too. "Speaking of problems, the demonic invasion from Tartarus. How should we deal with that?"

"Demons aren't *that* hard to deal with," Maya said from the corner of the room, still sitting on Twilight's (now sleeping) egg. "Maybe you could interview me or Tatsuya on how you can just Contact them."

"Contact?" the fillies asked in unison.

"Think normal demon negotiation from Amala," Maya continued, "but you don't need to bribe them. Just use your special talent when you talk to them-singing, impressions, fortune telling, fashion tips, lessons on friendship, magic tricks, seduction, torture-"

"Wait, *what?!*"

"-Long story," Maya explained. "Kaoru can go over the top sometimes."

"...and what about Tirek?" Sweetie Belle asked. "I mean, if the rumors are strong enough to bend reality, and if all the demons are out of Tartarus now, we should spread one that could deal with him."

"Hm..." Applebloom tapped her hoof against her chin in thought. "...why don't we tell everypony that there's a monster from Tartarus that's *givin' ponies* magic rather than stealing it?"

"...really?" her other Crusaders asked.

"It's weird enough to be interesting and spread, and helpful enough that we don't need ta worry about Tirek getting too powerful from rumor magic or anything." Applebloom's grin widened further and further as she went on. "It's *genius!*"

"That's one for the front page!" Scootaloo exclaimed, writing it down in italics. "It's a great plan! It's *foalproof!"*

…

Author: Masterweaver

"...and that's basically what's going on," Vinyl finished awkwardly.

Octavia nodded thoughtfully. "Well, I... I thank you for being honest with me, miss Scratch, but... if I am not completely incorrect, we weren't actually dating at the start of this, ahem, loop. And now we are, and I cannot figure out why-"

"Yeah, uh, you know how I mentioned variant loops?" Vinyl glanced around. "This is a variant loop. Well, technically it's a crossover loop, but-the point is, for whatever reason, if enough people believe in some rumor or other, the universe adjusts itself so that rumor is true."

The gray mare stared at her.

"Which isn't to say I'll be taking advantage of the situation," Vinyl assured her quickly. "In fact, putting this on the record: You are the leader in this relationship, you decide what happens when, I'm just going to follow you."

Unfortunately for the unicorn, she didn't notice the other pony passing by with an interested look. Within the week, the rumor mill had taken her sentence so far out of context that the tabloids were screaming. But, all things considered, she could live with the more interesting results.

…

Author: Evilhumour

"But-" the white pony started to protest when the earth pony flicked Vinyl's nose with her black tail, eliciting a blush on the white mare.

"Vinyl, I have read my journal. Not *once* was I under you," Octavia grinned, leaning over to the unicorn's face. "So for your attempted lie I am going to have to punish you."

Vinyl was ready for anything physical that the mare could do to her. She was *not* ready for Octavia to steal her glasses and run off with a laugh.

…

Author: Gamerex27

"Apollo!"

With a snap of his hoof (which he *still* was not sure how he did), Tatsuya summoned his Persona in a flash of light, rekindling the fire burning under Twilight's egg.

"Between that and Spike's mail thing," Sweetie Belle commented, as she glanced back to Spike sending out their papers to the local distributors in a blast of magic fire, "we're lucky Twilight doesn't have smoke detectors."

A loud crash outside Twilight's house brought their attention to a nearby window, where Iron Will and a demonic Minotaur with a skull nose wrestled and clashed outside.

"Hang on, let me help," Maya said, hopping off Twilight and heading outside. "Stay clear: it's weak to Ice magic!"

"...speaking of magic..."

The Cutie Mark Crusaders turned to Tatsuya, who pointed to the egg Apollo was incubating. "My Persona felt it start to-"

A crack formed in the egg. And another. And another.

"Ah," Scootaloo said, in a deadpan tone, "the miracle of childbirth."

"Oh, shush," Twilight said, as her egg continued to break open. "*You* haven't had to be a *biological* mother before. This is *nothing*."

With that, she bucked her egg open.

"*Finally!*" she cheered, stretching out her back and shaking her mane free of egg shell, "I'm out of the moss-damned thing!"

"...Uh..." Applebloom started, then trailed off. "Twi? The rumor...don't look like it's worn off yet."

"...what do you mean?" she asked. "I'm *out of the egg!* Isn't that enough?"

Tatsuya shared an uneasy glance with the fillies, then pulled a bicycle out of his Pocket. "Not really," he said, turning the mirror to face Twilight.

She looked in the mirror. She wasn't sure *how* she looked in the mirror, given that she had no eyes, but she did so anyways.

The egg-headed Twilight looked to Tatsuya. Looked to the Crusaders. Then back to the mirror.

"I. Hate. This. Curse," she moaned, cradling her eggshell in her hooves.

...

Author: Evilhumour

Without any warning, Scootaloo suddenly let out a loud cluck of surprise, causing everypony to turn and stare at her.

The orange chicken blinked, looked at her reflection and then facewinged.

"Of *course* this would happen..." she muttered under her breath.

Berry Punch, the mare rumored to be the town drunk, took several steps into the Golden Oaks, stumbling with every step.

"Izzz *hates* thess stuupid looop!" the mare slurred, hiccuping before spinning around and passing out on the chicken, snoring loudly.

There was a sudden gush of air, causing the egghead pony, the flailing chicken and several ponies to look up at the gryphon trying to scowl at them but failed to really do so.

"Gilda?" Twilight asked, somehow using sight behind sight to see her friend. She looked odd, a bit stiff yet loose at the same time-

"Gilda, why are ya a giant plushie?" Applebloom asked, tilting her head.

Gilda grumbled, squeaking as she walked into the library. "Rumor had it I was a really softie and *then* it turned into I was an *actual* one!" Squeaking, Gilda sat down on the makeshift nest and began to shift around to get comfortable, squeaking as she did so. Looking at the snickering crowd, she frowned at the. "Laugh, and I swear I will *SQUEAK* you!" Gilda threatened, holding out a claw to the ponies around her. Blushing Gilda, simply fluffed her wings out and prepared to deal with this loop.

…

Author: Harosata

Somepony knocked on the door. "May I come in?"

"Um, I guess?" Twilight looked as a stallion walked in. "Dr. Hooves?"

"Is that with a W or just the plural of these?" Dr. Hooves held up his hooves. "And before you ask, I am the Doctor according to my memory, but I haven't figured out if these rumors brought me to this Loop or if I am just a pony who suddenly have knowledge of Looping. Anyway, I figured that the Anchor would be trying to find the source of this rumormonger phenomenon, so I came to help."

Tatsuya might have heard of him. "The Doctor? Isn't that the Looper who always gets shot by a-"

A laser zapped Dr. Hooves and turned him into ash. One glance outside, and they saw what looked like a giant salt shaker disappear into the horizon. The pile of ashes seemed to huff. "Well, I can safely assume the rumors don't have to come from Equestria."

…

Authors: Gamerex27, Evilhumour

KNOCK. KNOCK.

"Nh. G'way," Trixie moaned, swatting at the air with a forehoof.

Whoever was at the door of her wagon just keep knocking, however. They seemed *very* insistent.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie needs her beauty sleep!" she muttered, as she slowly climbed out of bed and carefully crept towards the door.

"Go away!" she said, as she slammed the door open. "The Great and Powerful Trixie does *not*...entertain...loiterers..."

She shrunk in on herself as the *massive*, alicorn sized beast towered over her. The mix between a pony and a minotaur-a *centaur*, if Trixie remembered her mythology correctly-stood at her doorstep, clad in a red and white hat and matching uniform which did *not* contrast well with his coat.

"Ho ho ho!" he said, slapping his plump belly in what she could only assume was a bizarre greeting custom.

"...Who are you?!" Trixe asked, her bravado suddenly leaving her in the presence of a *giant bucking monster with horns that were way too sharp*.

"I'm Santa Tirek!" he said jollily. "Miss Trixie Lulamoon, I'm pleased to inform you that you're on the nice list after you made amends for your Alicorn Amulet episode!"

"How do you know abou-"

"Here is your *present!*" With that, Santa Tirek grabbed Trixie, and magic formed in his palm. In the span of a few seconds, ridiculous amounts of magical power poured into the comparatively tiny unicorn's body, and Tirek shrunk just a little bit.

"There you go, miss!" he said, putting the twitching Trixie down, not noticing that her coat and Cutie Mark were *a lot* brighter than usual, and oversaturated with color. "Happy Hearth's Warming Day!" he said, as he galloped off into Ponyville.

"But..." Trixie said, shivering as the magic coursed through her, "it's not-"

With a shriek of surprise, the excess magic fired from Trixie's horn, in a beam of sheer destructive power that would have made her Awake self proud.

"Um..." Trixie said, as she stared at the part of the Everfree Forest she had just annihilated, with a surprised zebra witch staring at her from the new hole in her house. "Trixie is...I'm sorry! I don't know what's going ooooooon!" she blurted out, as another jet of magic erupted from her mouth, this time, and propelled her into the sky with the sheer force of the blast.

"Something has gone horribly wrong," Tatsuya noted as he took note of the various fires, wrecked buildings, and bemused ponies all over Ponyville.

"'What could go wrong?' ya said?" Applebloom grumbled, as her friends sheepishly avoided her glare. "Honestly, ya haven't figured out by now to *never* say those words?"

"Everypony slips up sometimes," Sweetie Belle could only say.

"It could be worse," Maya noted, as she watched an annoyed team of weather pegasi chasing after a unicorn shooting herself into the stratosphere. "No one's been hurt or killed yet, and it's nothing that can't be fixed with some carpenters and hard work."

"-do you MEAN, 'I'm on the Naughty List!'" Twilight shrieked in the background, near the house/library they had arrived at on the way back from the press conference in Canterlot.

"I am most displeased with you, young Egg Sparkle. You have been very naughty and I had to give you a lump of coal." Tirek said, turning his head as he noticed the library was now on fire. "Ho ho uh oh."

As Tirek galloped off again, Twilight turned to stare as her home burned to the ground. *Again*.

If she still had eyes, they would be twitching like mad.

"I can't take it anymore," she announced, turning to face the group. "We're going to the Collective Unconciousness, we're *finding* Nyarlathotep, and we're *bucking that bucker's* face in until he lifts this bush-forsaken curse!"

"'Bush forsa-'" Tatsuya trailed off. "...Alright, then. Let's get the portal ritual ready."

…

Author: Gamerex27

"...Where are we, exactly?"

"The collective unconsciousness of all manki-uh, marekind," Maya replied. "This is where everything we fight and face in our home Loop comes from."

"Including Shadows?" Twilight asked, staring off into the distance with her egg-head.

"Including Shadows," Tatsuya confirmed. "Why do you ask?"

Twilight just pointed ahead with a forehoof. From behind one of the pillars of the gazebo they found themselves in walked herself. The being was a dead ringer for Twilight, save for her normal, not-eggy head...and her piercing, yellow eyes.

She opened her mouth to speak, and-

"No!"

Shadow Twilight stopped, and stared at them.

"I get it!" Twilight hissed, walking up to her Shadow Self. "I KNOW what you are! All of my darkest secrets, right? I know. I *know* that I'm afraid that I'm *not me* anymore, after all these Loops! I KNOW that I'm afraid I've become a different mare after all this time, and I KNOW that I've gone crazy and done some terrible things!

"But I'm *not alone!* I've got *dozens of my friends* here with me in the Loops! No matter what happens, I won't lose myself like other Loopers! Not with my friends by my side, to keep me going! So, *could you get out of our BUCKING WAY?!"*

The Shadow uncomfortably shuffled in place. "Uh...I was just going to ask *why* I was here."

If Twilight had had eyes, she would have blinked in confusion. "Huh?"

"I mean, you already know all that," her dark self stated. "I had a whole speech like that planned out, and you just admitted all that before I could get going. Even in your mind, you're already going through everything else you're worried about, everything else you'd hide, and are agreeing with it. There's...nothing for me to say."

"...So...uh...why did you come out in the first place?" Twilight asked.

"I have no idea. I think Nyarlathotep, or whatever's doing all this, was expecting you to reject me and drew me out of our body," Shadow Twilight said. "Guess he didn't know you changed already, huh?"

"But you did," Twilight said, smiling with a nonexistent mouth. "Because you're me, and I'm you."

"...right again," Shadow Twilight said, chuckling. "Hope you don't mind this," she said, as she faded in a swirl of blue light.

"Mind wha-" Twilight stopped herself as she looked up.

The pure white coat. The crescent moon horn, with one on its forehead and one pointing backwards off its head. The strong defined jaw.

And the eight legs.

"One who soars above their herd to guide thy friends," he announced, "I shall fly with you. I am Sleipnir Lokison, of the Star Arcana. From the sea of thy soul I cometh, and to there I return. For I am thou, and thou art I."

With that, the Persona dissolved in another burst of blue light, and floated down to Twilight's eye level as a simple card, no bigger than her hoof. It held the image of a faced star on it, and was labeled "XVII."

"...Maya," Twilight said slowly. "Tatsuya. *Why* is the representation of my true inner self a *stallion*?!"

"A Persona's gender doesn't always match the wielder," Tatsuya explained. "Lisa had the god Eros, Ken had Nemesis, Naoto had Sukunu-Hikona..."

Twilight sighed. "Alright, then. Let's find wherever this curse is coming from and break it."

...

"No luck?" Scootaloo asked as the three ponies (and current Diamond Dog) emerged from a portal. The lack of any kind of battle wounds made it obvious that they hadn't found their culprit.

"Nyarlathotep's not here," Twilight replied, shaking her literal egg head. "The collective unconsciousness of equinekind isn't too different from humans', but that's not a factor here, or he's just not showing up. There isn't some god, eldritch abomination, or curse causing all this. Whatever it is, it's mare-made."

"I'd bet on Star Swirl," Sunset added. "He got up to some crazy stuff, even in Baseline. I remember reading that much before my, uh, 'evil jerk' phase started."

"You know," Rainbow Dash said, wheeling herself over (as slowly as possible) to the group in her magical bubble, "I thought of something. Curses like these-I think I saw something like this in a Daring Doo book once-in a Variant where she had different adventures. They can be broken by contradictions."

"Really?" Sweetie Belle asked. "What kind of rumor would cause such a stable and massive spell system to break down and implode on itself?"

"Hm..." Applebloom muttered, pacing in place and ignoring the way her bow was *still* being pulled towards Canterlot (she'd already been forced to close the window to stop it from flying all the way there before it got ripped off her head. "How 'bout, 'the spell causing rumors to literally become true has been broken?' Ya think *that* would work?"

"Worth a shot," Maya said, shrugging. "Back home in Sumaru City, most people didn't know that rumors were becoming true, since they worked retroactively. But here, a lot of ponies-Loopers, mostly-already figured it out. So it *might* work."

"Alright, I'll put it in our next-"

Suddenly, Sweetie Belle was flattened by a throne falling from the...ceiling?

Wedged into it was an annoyed Princess Celestia, her bulging, massive flanks wedged snugly into the sides of her chair.

She stared at the strange pony with an egg for a head. It only took her a few seconds to notice that she had her student's Cutie Mark and coat color, and quickly made the connection.

"Twilight," Celestia said, giving her a sad smile and sighing. "...Can you see me?"

"Yes. Not sure how, but I can."

"Do you know what's going on?' she asked. "One second I'm sitting in my throne in the middle of *another* boring meeting with nobles, then the next my flanks grew so big and rapidly that I was stuck in the seat." She tried in vain to pull herself free again, with even her mighty magic failing to get her away from the trapped throne. "On the other hoof, they stopped laughing after they were turned into donkeys a few seconds later. You should have *seen* how they lost their *minds* when they realized they had to *pick things up with their mouths* like 'peasants.'"

"Told you that saying all nobles were to be punished as asses wouldn't work," Maya said, grabbing some yen from Tatsuya's outstretched hoof. "What did you expect with that?"

"Still worth it," he said. "They tried to have you thrown in a *dungeon* when you asked if the budget cuts and his new mansion were connected in that interview. I...should have phrased that better."

As Tatsuya and Maya continued to talk in the background, Twilight explained what was going on with the curse on Ponyville.

"I see," Celestia said. "That would explain why the moon vanished, why Luna fell into a coma until I decided to just make it a new moon night on my own initiative, and why Tirek suddenly became a 'good guy' and made several houses burn down by giving ponies more magic than their bodies could handle. Especially to earth ponies, who can't channel it in the more direct ways pegasi and unicorns can. And why *I'm* here all of a sudden. A rumor I was coming to visit...a *bit* more literal than I would have liked."

"Issue's out," Spike announced as he sent the last of the papers away in a burst of flame. "Since it's mostly local, enough ponies should get their hooves on it in time to get it going in the next hour or so."

"Help." From under the throne, Sweetie Belle's hoof extended, trying in vain to push the seat off her.

"You're still alive?" Scootaloo asked.

"The throne's hollow underneath," Celestia explained. "It's a good place to hide my cake stas-er, I mean, to put petitions and bills I don't read. No, that sounds *awful* too...Wait...you should be a *lot* more worried about your friend's safety than 'mild surprise,'" she realized, her eyes narrowing.

"Time Loop," Applebloom explained before Celestia could go on the warpath. "Hey, could y'all get Sweetie and Celestia out of the throne while Ah explain it to her?"

"Method 7 works best when she's under stress like this," Twilight recommended, even as her horn started to glow with purple magic. "Remember to use the slide projector."

After several painful and *loooong* minutes, Maya, Tatsuya, Twilight, their respective Personas, Sunset, and Scootaloo managed to both yank Celestia out of her throne (albeit with some painful-looking bruises dotting her coat) and get an annoyed Sweetie Belle out from under the chair.

"Wait a second," Twilight said as the group celebrated their victory. "I...I think I feel it!" she said, as her tail perked up. "I can feel the spell breaking!" She suddenly stopped, her egg turning stark white. "I can fe31*$&%^%&-

"I can feel the Loop crashing," Twilight finished, as she Awoke in the usual Gen 3 punishment Loop. Grumbling to herself, she plucked the post-it note off of her horn and read it.

Reality is not a toy for you to mess with as you wish. Consider more carefully how you dispel such magics in the future.

From the desk of Taira no Masakado, Admin of Amala (condolences for such not needed).

"...you know," Sunset said from behind her, "I heard a rumor that Rainbow Dash always dresses in-"

"Don't. Even. Start," said mare hissed, trying in vain to find some way to make the elegant and beautiful cocktail dress seem less frilly.

Start of Thread 2

Chapter Notes

The following snips are from the defunct Project X thread.

[Persona 2]
Tatsuya's Awakening – part 1
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

He remembered the first time. Just a blink after what he thought to *finally* be his oblivion, his *release*. And he found himself holding a worn screwdriver he had almost forgotten about, crouched over a familiar engine he knew better than the back of his hand. He heard a semi-familiar voice behind him. He got up – he could never afford to stay on his knees – and he saw two faces he had forgotten but in a situation he remembered all too well.

His motorcycle had been sabotaged.

Instinctively, he looked for his anchor. He pressed his thump over the familiar engraving, and that was when reality fully landed on him – *crushed* him.

It wasn't over.

It was worse than being stabbed – he knew that feeling all too well – and even though there was no physical wound he collapsed all the same, he could still feel *"His"* tendrils crawling inside his skin and he yanked his sleeve up because *hadn't he done enough*

It was gone. His skin was clear, blemish-less, as if the brand had never been there.

"Huh?"

Was this a new punishment? Was this a second chance? *How?*

Distantly, he heard the two faces approach him in concern, but to him they did not exist, too preoccupied in searching his own soul for answers because he knew his mind could not be trusted.

Apollo answered back. He could even feel Vulcanus in there, and every Persona he held before going back. It was extraordinary.

He felt the missing part of the engine being shoved in his open palm. Right, There were people here.

He fixed the engine quickly ignoring the Principal's jabs – his name was Hanya, he had to remember that – and left the concerned student who popped up a moment later a message for Miss Saeko. She would understand, most likely. After all, she had been in a similar place not too long ago.

"*I have important mistakes to fix. Then I will tell you what I want to do."*

…

Last time this had happened, he had chosen not to speak in favour of listening. This time, he chose not to speak in favour of glaring. If Philemon had noticed this, he made no move to acknowledge it. His old friends certainly had not noticed. They were confused right now as if they had awakened to their Personas for the first time and in a way, they had. The world had been reset after all – again.

Reset buttons came with a heavy price. That was yet another truth he had learned at the Other Side.

One of the things Tatsuya Suou had always feared the most was making decisions. Should he speak up? Or not? Would that change anything? Would "He" crawl through the skin of his friends as well if they remembered?

Dazed as he was in his thoughts, he had not noticed Philemon had finished his speech. One after the other, they both vanished in golden stardust. Philemon finally turned to him.

"Unfortunately" he started "while I am aware of your situation, I do not know its causes. My servant Igor had mentioned to me this strange phenomenon, and it was later reported by other Persona users like yourself. I assure you that neither I nor the Crawling Chaos had any influence in this."

Tatsuya decided to take it face value. If anything, Philemon had never lied.

"I sense that all the power and all the Personas that you had acquired on the Other Side are still awakened in your soul." Tatsuya took a moment to remind himself that this time the "Other Side" was the one in which "His" puppet was Tatsuzu Sudou.

"Frankly, after you and your allies defeated the Crawling Chaos for the second time, I decided to refrain from interfering with any future Persona users. I recall a number of years ahead from this one, and for many, the true meaning of Persona and its power have both been lost. As you should recall, your Persona Apollo was weakened in many ways at the Other Side." Tatsuya remembered that. Even though summoning had been easier than ever, literally half his elemental immunities had been lost, forcing him to completely review his strategies.

"There are not many things I can do to aid you, but I give you this." Something briefly glowed in Tatsuya's chest before settling in. He sensed a change in Apollo and stared at Philemon quizzically.

"I have rendered your Persona immune to the deteriorating effect of the Other Side. In addition I have merged the different sides of Nova Kaiser into one new whole."

He could not possibly mean… A *triple elemental Nova Kaiser?* That was… overkill.

"This is all I can do for you. Will you turn this new opportunity in a glorious new dawn? Or will you bring forth the prophecy of ruin? Apollo embodies both… I have faith in you, Tatsuya Suou."

With that final greeting, Tatsuya felt himself fading away.

He woke up on the cold floor of Sumaru Prison feeling lightheaded. Ginko was looming over him but he made no move to push her away.

Faith, huh?

He should… he thought bitterly. *Last time I saw him, we were in his realm with Maya-nee, Brother, Ulala-san and Baofu fighting against him. And we won.*

He hoped that at the Other Side, things would be better. That the New World Order would never appear, that the people would not hang from every word the alluring fortune teller spilled, that Maya and his brother and the him on the Other Side would get to live normal lives and chase their dreams…

For This Side too. He would win.

[Persona 2]
Jun's Awakening – part 2
Author: me

Of course, the mere act of throwing Tatsuya "I'LL BURN YOU TO ASHES" Sudou into a burning pit from the fourth or fifth floor was by no means enough to deter the man. Both Jun and Tatsuya knew that, so while waiting for him, Jun had taken over moving the kids to a room further inside the restaurant modeled after a blimp which had turned into an actual blimp, while Tatsuya was trying to figure out how to stop it from crashing. In spite of his rumour-fueled supreme driving and piloting skills, he had never been able to stop the crash. Or the blimp taking off for that matter. Or the museum burning.

His sharp hearing caught Jun's footsteps before he announced his presence. "All the children are safe now, Tatsuya. They won't have to see a death now."

This was important. In both Sides, Tatsuya and whichever team may have accompanied him at the time, he had to kill the insane arsonist in front of a bunch of terrified children, and he regretted that fact every day. He would rather not to have to kill at all, but…

"Thank you, Jun." *I can ease my consciousness now, at least a bit…*

"You are planning to kill him, aren't you Tatsuya?" Jun's gaze was mournful. Tatsuya knew that expression all too well. Out of all the people he had ever met, Jun was the one to despise death the most, as well the one to recover from his shock the fastest. Just another sign of how messed up they all are.

"Shiori-san asked me to." Jun did not know her, but the explanation was enough.

Tatsuya took a deep breath. He was never one to talk first. "Aren't you…"

The beautiful young man shook his head. "You can tell me later, Tatsuya. I'll wait." Gods bless Jun and his ability to understand him. He had saved him from many, *many* awkward pauses when they were children, and now he spared him from many painful explanations as an adult.

Heh. Adult.

Tatsuya found his gaze drawn to the flower in Jun's breast pocket. On the Other Side, it had been a yellow Iris, before he had changed it to the Salvia flower that Big Maya had given him. This blossom however was one that he had never seen before.

"It's an Adonis flower. It's meaning is 'sorrowful remembrance'." Tatsuya felt a pang of guilt through his heart. If it were not for his sin… His friend's hand fell on his shoulder, startling him. "It's not your fault."

How can you tell me that Jun? After everything I did? Will you still be able to say that after I commit a murder I've been practically hired for? Will you still be able to tell me that after you learn the truth?

A sudden explosion cut his usual gloomy thoughts short. "He's back…" Of course he was.

Jun suddenly appeared to be in a very good mood. "I wonder if he lost the other eye." The leather-clad young man stared at him incredulously. "Would you mind if I deal with him, Tatsuya? From one Joker to another."

"J-Jun…?" His closest friend looked positively evil. Granted, he always was a bit gleeful when fighting demons but this was another level.

"Don't worry. I'll take good care of him."

The effeminate young man had his most seductive gaze on, deeply inhaling the scent of his flower, his only visible eye half-lidded in such a way that his long eyelashes casted long shades on his cheek and his lips were curled in a wicked soft smile.

It was at that moment that Tatsuya remembered just *how* his most sensitive friend ended up in the reform school in the first place.

That's right. Jun loves humanity, with all of its aspects, both the light and the dark in their souls... But not the people.

"Alright. Go ahead."

There was no stopping him.

[Persona 4], [RWBY], [BlazBlue], [Under Night In-Birth]
(no title)
Author: Black Omochao

"Give me your weapon! I must have one!"

"No! Get the hell off me!"

"Ruby… you really should stop," Weiss sighed as she watched her Anchor chase around the other silver-haired Looper, amongst the myriad of other chibis populating the strange 'lobby' room.

"I will stop… just as soon as this selfish edge-lord lets me examine that sword!" Ruby exclaimed with an exaggerated expression of frustration.

"WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME!?" the chibi-Ragna shouted back in rage, still making sure to keep out of Ruby's range.

Weiss let out a sigh as she shook her head, sitting on the ground.

"There really isn't much to their thought-processes, is there?" a pig-tailed vampire commented from the Schnee's side, having somehow materialized a table and chair that she sat at.

"I feel you give them too little credit," Weiss replied, watching as Ragna finally stopped running from Ruby and decided to just fight her, to which Ruby was happy to oblige. "Rather, it's not that they're *incapable* of more complex thoughts, but that they *choose* to approach things in more straightforward ways."

"Perhaps, but in some ways, is that not worse?" Rachel suggested, as Ragna and Ruby's clash resulted in knocking both of them to opposite sides of the room.

"It all depends on your perspective. I can't speak for Ragna, but Ruby can be very intelligent, when she wants to be," the white-haired girl assured, though frowned soon after. "But, now is not one of those times…"

"*Clearly*," the chibi-vampire nodded.

"Damn riding-hood," Ragna muttered as he stumbled after crashing into a wall. "If there were ever a more annoying girl…"

"Ragna… Ragna~" a pale-cyborg girl chanted as she creeped around the corner, her one uncovered eye focused on the silver-haired man.

"… Why do I always speak too soon?"

"Oh… dizzy…" Ruby muttered, having hit the wall on the other side of the room. "That was fun."

"Um… are you okay?" Yosuke asked as he looked at the fallen Ruby, the red-clad Anchor just gave a thumbs-up in response. "Okay then…"

"Say, why can't these get-togethers ever be peaceful?" Labrys questioned as she popped up behind the brown-haired Persona-user.

"Because it's pretty much our lot in life, that's all there is to it," Hyde commented from nearby, his arms crossed with a frustrated expression, Merkava letting out screams from a few feet behind him wasn't helping…

"The beast HUNGERS!"

"Settle down, will ya'!?" luckily, Jubei saw it fit to quiet Merkava down with a swift kick to the head.

[Persona 4], [RWBY]
(no title)
Author: wildrook

Yosuke groaned as someone helped him out of the trash can. "Thanks," he muttered. "I swear, I thought I've learned how to avoid that thing."

"Don't sweat it," the female said, catching his attention. "My sister has made a worse first impression before."

Then he realized that someone would be replacing Nanako this Loop...and at this point, Dojima. "Word of advice, I'm pretty sure that Yu would treat Ruby as a younger sister, but joining a family..."

"We usually don't recruit. They just happen, some are okay with it, and some aren't." Yang was then walking with him to school. "Still, how long is it until you get that scooter?"

Yosuke looked away. "Actually, the pain of re-registering comes first. I've already got said scooter in my Pocket." He groaned. "Otherwise, it's pretty quiet...although I saw the look you gave Mitsuo Kubo. Personal experience?"

"Cost me an arm, too."

The Prince of Junes gave out a wince. "So, how's the wife?" he asked her. "I heard about the wedding and the brawl that came with it, so I got concerned."

"It'll take more than just a jilted lover to rile us up...they really had no idea what awaited them."

Yosuke gave out a smile. "Is she here?"

"The whole team's and our Uncle's Awake, but he's not going to be available due to dealing with his job."

"Yeah, I had a feeling he'd be dealing with Adachi. I was thinking we'd have a pre-Midnight Channel meeting..."

"And I thought you'd take the opportunity to hit on her," a voice said, catching both Yang and Yosuke's attention as they looked to see Chie with a certain DVD case, "but it seems like you're just talking. You really have changed, Yosuke."

Yosuke flinched. "It wasn't enough to avoid cracking your Bruce Lee movie, Chie." He then gave her a stare. "Besides, I'm kind of waiting for a phone call so they can find her."

"Ah, you're talking about Labrys. Well, if you're paying for lunch, can I come as well?"

Now that gave him a huge amount of dread when he realizes he's paying for five. "Just make sure not to break my wallet."

Yang gave out a chuckle. "Sounds like you two are getting along," she muttered.

Yosuke smiled. "Yeah, this kind of friendship is worth the small town experience," he replied.

...

Indeed, there was a lot of confusion as Yosuke brought Team RWBY and Chie to Junes, thinking he turned into a playboy.

Weiss just noticed the dirty looks and the Manager's Son ignoring them. "And I thought you'd kill to have this kind of attention," she muttered.

"You're thinking of Baseline me at this point," Yosuke muttered. "Just ignore them. They have no idea it's just a friendly meeting."

Chie just finished eating. "Subpar as usual," she replied. "Although I'm pretty sure there are better places to take them."

"Like I said, if I took them to an actual steakhouse, I'd have to do double-duty. Especially with your appetite, Miss Carnivore!"

"This coming from Captain Resentment?"

Blake gave out a stare. "Although it kind of looks like the Captain is becoming the resented," she said, noting said looks. "They have no idea that we're in a relationship, do they?"

"Nope," Yang replied, smirking. "It's funnier that way." She then looked at Chie. "Yukiko couldn't make it?"

"No, she's got trouble at the inn," Chie muttered. "Honestly, we know who's capable of doing it, but from my experience, there's a lot of work to be done before we can actually catch the killer."

Ruby blinked, in the middle of her cookie dive. "You need some help with that?" she asked them.

"Actually," Yosuke said, "I'm kind of waiting for the group to get together before we can make our move. Kanji's helping out his Mom at Textiles, Teddie..." He then noticed the bear costume helping out Saki. "...Well, he's present and on the job, and while Chie already mentioned Yukiko helping quell the aftermath, we're still waiting for Naoto and Rise to show up."

Weiss got the idea. "And without the leader in this Loop," she said, "you're acting as leader of this group."

"I've already accepted the fact that my partner's not going to be in Inaba forever. Someone has to take the reins."

Chie blinked. "That's...surprisingly mature," she muttered.

Yosuke gave out a smile. "Thanks," he said. "I've been dwelling on this since the P-1 Grand Prix incident, so unless you have any objections..."

"No, not really," Ruby said, finishing her cookies. "It would help if we had someone who knows the layout of the Midnight Channel before we could take action."

"It's less about the layout," Teddie said, finishing his shift, "and more on how it would reflect the heart of the person that fell in. And that can vary from person to person."

"What Teddie said," Yosuke replied, scooting over as he let the bear sit. "Heck, he's from there and even he is surprised at the unpredictability of the TV World."

"Which means," Weiss muttered, "while we know the who, we don't know what's going to spawn." She then glanced at them. "Also, you guys mentioned something about a fog...how are we going to see through that."

"TA DA!" Teddie yelled, bringing out four pairs of glasses. One of them had red frames and square lenses, another had white frames and oval lenses, a third had black frames (that were secretly adjustable for Blake's Faunus form) and lens that resembled reading glasses, and the fourth were yellow-framed aviators. What they had in common were the team colors on both sides of the frame attaching the ear-holder and the front. "These are perfect for those who want to see through the un-bear-able fog of the Midnight Channel, and all of them are personally claw-crafted by yours truly!"

Blake looked at the black pair and was amazed at the forethought involved with her pair. "The amount of forethought involved with this is shocking," she muttered. "How'd you..."

"Call it a hunch," Teddie replied. "Can't exactly forget that you're quite the cat's meow."

Yosuke face-palmed. "Dude, she's married," he muttered, noticing Chie give out a glare. "Keep the pick-up lines to a minimum, okay, Teddie?"

"Can't deny that she's purr-fect with or without them, though," Yang retorted, causing everyone (Yosuke and Chie included) to groan.

"Oh Dust, there are two of them," Weiss said, double face-palming.

"How long do we have to wait for Naoto and Rise?" Chie asked Yosuke.

The only human male at the table gave her a stare. "Until May," he muttered. "I don't know how long our sanity will last, though..."

[SMT IV]
Variant: APOCALYPSE – part 1
Author: me

Isabeau let out a long sigh as for the quite possibly millionth time she approached the hige boulder in which the protector god of Tokyo, Masakado was sealed. Flynn was not Awake in this Loop so everything had more or less proceeded as Baseline; thankfully, she had been able to steer him in the right direction. The only oddity in the loop had been those children she never recalled meeting before, but that was nothing too odd. Variations happened; this was just one of the smaller ones. If it were not for those, she would have gone mad in those loops far, FAR earlier.

All that was left was for him to draw Masakado's Katana and it would be over. The Loop would soon reset.

A very sudden earthquake proved her wrong.

In front of her were deities.

Several deities which she had never seen before or recognized, all gathered together standing between Flynn and the stone. One of these gods stepped forward …floating as if he owned the place. If not for that fact, Isabeau might not have been able to tell he was a demon at all.

"Greetings, Flynn" started the demon, and Isabeau was stunned to hear not distortion in it. "I am Krishna of the Divine Powers. The Divine Powers have but one goal: the salvation of the entire world."

What?

What was going on here!? Was this a new variant? A timeline expansion? No, that was impossible, she had learned her native loop far too well to call this an expansion, but so many gods she did not know! Was this a crossover with a new section of Amala? Flynn was not Awake, so she feared for his reaction… The timing couldn't be worse than this.

"What do you mean, "salvation"?" Flynn had taken an offensive stance, one hand maintaining a firm grip on Masakado's Katana, the other on his own sword. Isabeau inwardly let a sigh of relief at that. She could tell that he was surprised, but he did not allow himself to be thrown off by this.

The demon – Krishna – answered with an enigmatic smile, and no such a subtle hint of cockiness. "I serve neither Lucifer nor Merkabah. My salvation is for the good of humanity."

Isabeau did not buy this for a second. "So, there are demons that have decided not to side with Lucifer or Merkabah, and you speak for them?" She was honestly astonished by the statement. This was completely unknown territory. If only Flynn was Awake…

Krishna chuckled. "In a way…" That did not clarify anything other than the fact that his intentions were not as pure as he claimed.

His expression hardened. "This world is ruled by a "creator" who has no qualms declaring himself the one true god."

No…

"It was he who sealed humans in cages of flesh and trapped them in this universe, bound by words."

"We are all merely pawns to the creator" continued another god who held a spear and a crow.

This cannot be…

Krishna once again took over. "Such insolence will not be forgiven. He will die for it. Flynn… Will you become our savior? My Kalki? Join me, and bring salvation."

Her mind went blank. She was right. Th-they were asking Flynn to kill *Him*... The same being who doomed Aleph for all eternity… YHVH.

"And if I refuse?" Please, please do Flynn…

The god with the spear stepped forward. "Then your impudence will be met by force."

Lightning struck. Isabeau's heart almost stopped. She almost collapsed when she saw he was fine.

"You dodged it. I'm impressed, human. Pity for the child though…"

Child? What child?

A loud yell came from behind her. Both Samurai turned around in shock to witness one of the gods having captured a girl and chocking her. A boy was with her looking paler than the dead.

The children from earlier.

"Don't move. The girl's life is in your hands now. I am Maitreya of the Divine Powers." It was unclear who it spoke to, but that did not matter. It might as well have addressed all of them.

She almost missed what the demons said next. "Tsukiji Konganji is under the control of the Divine Powers." Wait, what? When? This was completely off baseline!

She knew how Flynn would react before she heard his sword dropping.

Several bolts of lightning rained at once. The humans present could only watch in shock as the god with the crow *tortured* Flynn bolt by bolt. Black smoke rose from his body. Isabeau went numb. *I-Impossible…*

"Flynn!"

The girl behind her was crying about how *she* was the one at fault. The god continued chocking her.

"You coward!" She was a looper. She was confident in her skill and power. If she gave it her all she could take out a good chunk of them by herself, right there and then.

But the children would die.

The boy was paralyzed. She could feel his aura of rage, but somehow he was more still than a statue. It was unnerving.

Krishna was smiling through it all. "Kalki is with us now. Release the girl."

The god obeyed. The girl ran towards them and Isabeau tried to remember her name. She had introduced herself earlier in the loop. "Asahi was it? Are you hurt?"

Just a moment too late, a band Hunters arrived. Isabeau was growing more puzzled by the second. That was not part of the baseline either. Did those children call for reinforcements? Were they loopers? Were they part of this new variant? What was going on here!?

Before she knew it, Hunters had arrived by the dozens. Flynn remained unresponsive through it all. *He is alive, right? They don't want him dead, so he's alive! Flynn is strong! Please!*

The Hunters were cursing at the gods. One called out to them, challenging them to kill Merkabah and Lucifer.

"They are merely stepping stones on the road to salvation" replied Krishna. "Our plan runs much deeper than that."

Isabeau was almost impressed at this point. The gal they must have to call the King of demons and God's Chariot mere stepping stones! *They really are aiming to kill YHVH…*

The world turned white with lightning, knocking everyone off their feet. A deafening crack was heard… from above. Light shone *through* the Ceiling as if it was nothing more than dyed glass and Isabeau could clearly discern a gigantic slithering figure casting its shadow through it…

A first pound. A second one. A serpent bigger than most things she saw in her life *pierced* through the Ceiling.

…what…

"Shesha… The great serpent of death and renewal will lead you all to Salvation. This is but a taste of the power that we possess. I am your light."

And as natural sunlight pierced through the Ceiling, Isabeau only knew one thing for certain.

This will be torture without you, Flynn…

[Persona 2]
Jun's Awakening – part 3
Author: me

Jun dealing with Tatsuya Sudou had gone surprisingly smoothly. The insane arsonist was already in shock of Jun actually tossing him in the fire pit, and even more shocked to find him opposing him alone at the other end of the blimp, Tatsuya too busy with piloting to come and help.

Tatsuya was not worried. He would let Jun have his fun. They were both the same; they had a vindictive streak, a dark rage that as dangerous as it was, it needed to be satisfied. They both embodied gods that brought forth disasters, so it was expected. Throughout the loops Tatsuya had learned more about the gods, demons, symbols and abominations that haunted them and he almost wanted to laugh at what must be one of the grandest cosmic jokes. They might as well have been designed for their roles before they were even born.

So yes. Jun would now kill in a world where he would never have to. It was not fine. It was not needed either. But he would do it anyway because he had his own message to send. And Tatsuya would allow it.

I am not getting Maya-nee involved. Not this time. I have Jun. And that was all he needed.

For his own part, Jun was staring down and the small cluster of demons that Sudou had at his disposal. Two Shax and two Minotaurs. He shook his head disapprovingly. Minotaurs had no real magic resistance, and compared to their enemies, bringing out Shax was almost laughable. They were weak to fire; Tatsuya could take each one of those enemies with one spell, easily.

The former King Leo was no better; dressed in a hospital gown and a long trench coat, black cuffs in his ankles and wrists and covered with blood, any semblance of the dignity he used to posses on the Other Side was gone and left behind nothing but the madness.

Sudou was shouting at him. *Begging*. "Why are you doing this master!? You know the truth! You proved yourself to the voices! Everything they said was right! You proved it! I followed the In' Lackeh step by step by your orders! Everything happened as the voices always told me!"

What a sad man… He reminded him of Tatsuya in a way, back on the other side. The boy that had no hope in life and clung on anything he could find. Tatsuya had grown out of that. Jun had laid his eyes on his and almost did not recognize him; he carried this air of confidence and maturity that even through his dark depressing thoughts shone like the sun itself. His inside beauty was shining now as much as his outside. He chuckled to himself. "Truly, like a god among mortals…"

"Huh?"

"You may have not seen my most recent Persona, King Leo…"

Jun took a deep breath and reached the depths of his soul. There it was… the dual existence, the two ancient beings that had fused into one and became his power.

The clock was ticking along with his heartbeat. Golden wings unfurled above him.

"***I am thou… Thou art I…"*** The deep, dark voice echoed and sent ripples through the air. The clicking of the clock signaled the inevitable; his face was time itself.

"***I am Chronos…The dark sun that kills its father and wields the scythe of false power…"***

That is the truth… Power is fleeting… The mere concept of it may be laughable… Tatsuya believes in power, but I cannot do that… It is little more than another aspect of reality, ever changing, never staying into one form, ever moving and shifting through gods, humans and demons…

"***You feel the karma that controls one's destiny deeper than your bones… The wheel keeps spinning, the circle is inevitable… Everything that rises is destined to fall and then rise again…"***

How well did he know that.

He opened his eyes. He had not realized that he had closed them.

Sudou was staring at him in awe. He always had that look full of wonder on his face when talking to him, but now it was stigmatized with horror.

"Tatsuya Sudou."

The madman snapped in attention at his name being called.

"You ask me to become a demon again and accomplish the Great Father's ideals… But I was always a demon in a way… I killed my own father to prove that I was in the right, and the victory was stolen from my- from *our* hands right away. Now we have all returned right where we started. This is the Wheel of Fortune. I am only a messenger of time, and thus death and rebirth… "Father" sought to end the cycle forever with destruction. My role is to preserve it."

He picked the Adonis flower from his breast pocket. It was not quite the flower he would have chosen for a fight – something with a more menacing meaning would do a better weapon – but that was what he had.

"I'm sorry."

The fight was on.

…

"That was quick."

Around half an hour later, both Tatsuya and Jun were lounging in Shiori-san's apartment, soaked to the bone. Not for the first time, Tatsuya was truly grateful that her place was so close to the beach. There was something funny about hiding from the police in a place that was a fifteen minutes walk from the police department.

Both of them had already showered, Tatsuya with his clothes on (Jun looked at him in disapproval at that. "It's faster that way" was Tatsuya's justification) and now they were both dressed in the changes of clothes that he kept in his pocket, Tatsuya abusing Apollo's abilities to getting them to dry faster. He did not even have to light a fire; with all the practice he had gotten, he could simply raise his body temperature to such degrees that he could even make the rain to evaporate on spot. He did not go as far for Jun's convenience, but the house still felt like a furnace. Jun appeared to be sweating in his oversized clothes. Tatsuya could catch a glimpse of his wiry but incredibly dense muscle through his opened collar shirt. Jun always looked so skinny with that uniform but he could clearly make out the bulging veins and the defined lines of his torso…

Okay, maybe he was staring a little.

"So Tatsuya." He snapped back to reality. Jun had a teasing smile and Tatsuya felt himself blush a little. "What exactly is going on here?"

The somber mood from earlier returned.

"It's a long story…"

Over two hours later, Jun was sitting in silence, his face blank. Tatsuya was waiting for his response. Not doubt he was feeling the exact same shock that Tatsuya himself felt about the loops. Maybe he was enraged about Tatsuya's choices in the baseline. Maybe he despaired over the entire branch of realities known as Amala being so fundamentally flawed, or perhaps he wondered why were they the only ones in their branch to lose their fight.

Or perhaps he was not doing any of the above and was instead laughing at how his worldview could be applied to the whole situation.

"So in other words, we are connected to a whole network of different worlds in which Earth is always brought to ruin by the entities born from humanity's own mind and its fear and greed of power, and because the Cosmos as a whole is damaged almost beyond repair we will have to repeat more cycles of the cycle."

"There are fused loops." Tatsuya reminded him.

"Unless we are the ones visiting, those barely change anything. Rumors become reality no matter where we go. Isn't that what you said?"

He nodded in confirmation.

"So, what is your plan?"

"…Plan?"

"You mentioned the TV station and the secret laboratory being raided at once, and therefore whichever team does not follow Maya have great difficulty in accomplishing their tasks. Michel and Lisa-san are also in danger. I think it would be best if we divided the two roles. What if I went to the TV station? Unlike Michel, Lisa-san doesn't know me, and thanks to Mother nobody will question me being present. If what you told me about Wang Long Chizuru's abilities is for this loop, I will be able to defeat her with ease."

Tatsuya smiled. Jun was a natural leader and quick thinker. "Sounds like a good plan."

Jun made a joke about zodiacs and leadership and Tatsuya faked an indignant scowl. Both of them laughed and decided to raid the fridge. Shiori was safe from the mafia in this loop thanks to Tatsuya's interference, so they had all day before she came back from work.

He had not laughed like that in a long time. He felt it from the depths of his heart. Their struggle would probably never end, but finally, he was at ease.

[Persona 1], [Persona 3]
(no title)
Author: me
Status: REJECTED

"I am Aegis. I am an Anti-Shadow Supression and Domination weapon produced by the Kirijo Electronics eroge products line."

Both Awake and non-awake members of SEES stared at her incredulously.

"My purpose is to serve Master Minato Arisato in all possible manners. I come equiped with the latest weapon technology as well as a special tube system that immitates the reproduction systems of the typical human female organism."

The squad's faces turned from disbelieving to horrified.

"I am also able to modify such systems to better accomodate Master Minato Arisato's individual needs and preferences. It is a great pleasure to serve you, Master." The non-awake Aegis bowed politely.

Silence reigned supreme.

Junpei exploded. "What the HELL, Mitsuru!?"

"I only Awoke yesterday, Junpei."

Suddenly Mitsuru's phone ringed to indicate an incoming message. Finding the timing strange, she flipped it open.

Unknown number?

"I hope you find my gift interesting, Miss Kirijo
~ Kei Nanjo"

Mitsuru's face darkened by a scowl so deep she looked older by twenty years. Everyone could feel the room temperature drop. She dialed the number.

"Kei Nanjo. What is the meaning of this."

"Just an old rumour spread by some of the more spiteful members of the Nanjo Conglomarate. I am afraid that they chose a very bad time to spread them..."

Mitsuru went through the implications in her head. She carefully analyzed his vocal tone. She came to a single conclusion.

"I will execute you."

"Bring it on, Miss Kirijo." He ended the call.

As she furiously marched upstairs, there was only one tbought running through everyone's heads.

CRAP.

[Persona 2]
Jun's Awakening – part 4
Author: me

Jun checked out his clothes on the mirror one more time. He had to be perfect in this. He and Tatsuya along with Miyashiro-san had gone over today's plans time and time again.

Shiori Miyashiro… She left quite the impression. A beautiful woman, impeccable in her appearance as befitting of a police officer and without a hint of makeup. Her eyes stood out; they were dead. It was like their eyes back when they all thought that Maya-neesan was gone.

Her resonance was odd too; definitely there, but almost non-existent; it was like that tiny cold breeze in a room that nobody ever notices unless they are specifically looking for it. According to Tatsuya, she did not have a Persona because she had been denying Philemon's pleads for over a decade on the principle that "it was rude to ask for someone's name without introducing yourself". Tatsuya had no idea what to make out of that, and frankly, neither did Jun. Perhaps rules such as basic courtesy were her safety net. Her comfort zone.

A woman like her was wasted on the juvenile division. It was the worst match they could have made. She was better suited as a prosecutor, or a field officer. They needed a jaded attitude like hers. A person with no dreams was not suited to guide others.

Perhaps that was the reason why even on the Other Side Tatsuya never made any of the important decisions. Thinking back, leadership always fell either on Jun himself or Maya-neesan, even when they were children. He thought of the Tatsuya he knew now… *Truly, he glows like a star… He has grown so much…*

Miyashiro-san was a good information gatherer. She had already confirmed that Maya-neesan's group was headed to the hidden laboratory along with Kei Nanjo, leaving the studio to Eriko Kirishima and a few other old classmates of hers from St. Hermelin High.

Tatsuya had warned him about them. *"All the St. Hermelin grads are loopers, save for the Rumormonger Toro. There's nobody Awake now but there's a chance they do at any given moment. Yukino-san will also be there, so be extra careful. The others can keep a secret so they won't tell Maya about me, but I'm not so sure of her. On top of that, even without the loops the Déjà Vu is still there. She may recognize you even without Awakening."*

Mayuzumi-san… He owed her a lot. His other self, most of all. Being his friends' guide and protector while he tried to kill them.

Jun took a final look in the mirror. A black dress shirt and pants, a forest green vest to match the colour of his zodiac sign, a grey cravat for extra flavor and black boots; his most practical pair, semi-hidden under the pants. These clothes should grant him enough mobility in the fight without raising suspicion that there was something up with him.

Tatsuya's watch was firmly secured on his wrist and the bouquet of flowers has hidden under his trench coat. He had chosen dill flowers for their ability to fight off evil. If anything, the JOKER curse should qualify.

JOKER… He supposed that killing those who were not desired by the people around them was another form of wish fulfillment.

He weighted his watch, trying to wash those thoughts away. It ticked in tandem with his heartbeat.

It was time.

…

As expected, the Sumaru TV studio was packed. The station's staff was running around almost in panic like they always did with the sole exception of the receptionist who was more bored than Sloth. Various publishing companies were flocking around her practically begging for an interview with all the celebrities and idols that would appear today. A whole crowd of fans were struggling with both the police and the private security for a slim chance of getting an autograph.

Nothing out of the ordinary. After all, today they had the J-pop Idol group Muses, the world-famous actress Junko Kurosu and the alluring Wang Long fortune teller Chizuru Ishigami all gathered in the same place. With his mother being an actress, Jun had gotten used to the ever-present chaos of a TV studio on both sides of reality, and he was well acquainted with the manner that those who lived under the spotlight were treated. On This Side, Jun had never been allowed beyond his mother's dressing room, but that was still a lot more access to the interior than everyone else in this city had. Sneaking around the rest of the studio would be easy.

He scanned the room more carefully, searching for Persona resonance while masking his own. Just as Tatsuya had warned him, Mayuzumi-san was chatting with her boss Fuuji-san, Hidehiko Uesugi and Eriko Kirishima. They were all being intensely watched by a black cat that had its own demonic presence.

People's intuition has greatly diminished… Wang Long Chizuru snuck in a Shiki as her pet and nobody noticed that there was something wrong with it… Well, Uesugi-san DID notice that there was something wrong with it because he made sure that the small creature was always in his field of vision. It was something that even the Jun on This Side had noticed; Uesugi-san had amazing instinct.

Miyashiro-san was outside with the rest of the police officers. Perhaps it was a risky move, but the other officers here would not find her presence odd. The underage crowd was a good alibi for her; she could just lie that she was observing the crowd for any signs of overly troubling behavior among the children. In reality she was here to cover for them when the gloves would be finally off. She was a good liar.

Situation properly inspected, Jun decided to head inside. He left his seat and approached the two guards that were guarding the entrance. One of them was pale like a sheet. He did not recall meeting him before.

Jun put on his most pleasant smile. "Good evening Ishida-san."

Ishida-san smiled brightly. "Hey, Jun-kun! What are you doing here? Guarding your mother from rabid fans?"

Jun giggled. "Among other things", he half-lied.

The guard was completely oblivious. "Well, make sure you watch your back too. You look pretty sharp today!"

"It wouldn't do for the media to show a Cuss High uniform inside the station on such a day, now would it."

"Ha, I guess you're right. You're heading in, right?"

"Yes" confirmed Jun.

"DON'T DO IT!"

Jun almost jumped off his skin. He turned to the other guard who was waving his arms frantically.

"Don't you know!? On the third Friday, a rainy day… Reiko Kashima appeared in the back of the studio!"

"Reiko… Kashima?" The old urban legend? Was she not supposed to only appear in toilets?

"Yes, Reiko Kashima! If you meet her, you must say this: "The R in Reiko stands for 'revenge'. The E in Reiko stands for 'eradication'. The I in Reiko stands for 'inescapable'. The

K in Reiko stands for 'kill'. The O in Reiko stands for 'obfuscate'." Say anything else and she will tear your legs off your body!"

"Um…" …*She has quite the reputation…*

Ishida-san shook his head in exasperation. "Don't mind him, Jun-kun. He's new here. What he actually saw was your mother. Though I kinda get where he's coming from…" The last part was whispered, but Jun caught in anyway.

He suddenly had a very clear image of his mother's torso in her dress covered with blood strangling random civilians while screeching for her legs and her name. *I have to admit that such a role would fit her…*

He shook his head. Now was not the time to think of potential horror movies.

Jun shook his head and headed to the studio.

…

Tatsuya was anxious.

No, he was beyond anxious. He was downright fidgeting. He flicked his lighter – Jun's lighter – again and again trying to find an outlet for his excess energy. In front of him was the entrance to the secret laboratory.

It was not the infiltration he was worried about. He had broken in this place in the baseline and he had done it again countless times. Throughout all his time in the loops, he had broken into more High Security facilities and military bases that he could count.

"The Highest Amala Branch Baseline Human Kill Count". Well, not exactly. He and Baofu-san along with Nanjo-san were the top three for the Persona branch, easily reaching triple digits, with half the St. Hermelin grads, Maya-nee, his brother and Ulala-san close behind. However he had no way of knowing what exactly the other Amala loopers had done. There was a good chance that Futsuo from the main branch was above them. Maybe Aleph, but he had no idea. He was not looping.

The fact that he was thinking such things made him sick.

He flicked his lighter in annoyance. His thoughts had gotten out of control again.

The real reason he was nervous is because he and Jun were separated in the middle of all the chaos.

"*They will definitely be suspicious"* was Shiori-san's warning. *"Sergeant Suou is an excellent detective, and from what I have gathered Amano-san and those who accompany her are very smart in their own right. The fact that all the children in the Aerospace museum were rescued without their interference will surely alert them of your involvement. The same goes for the higher ups in the police. It will not take much to deduce that you have at least one ally working with you."*

That was why Shiori had gone with Jun, or why they had decided to interfere with the TV studio in the first place rather than just leave it at Eriko-san's hands. Maya-nee, his brother and the others were not yet aware of his being the "Déjà vu Boy". The New World Order had no evidence whether Tatsuya Sudou was alive or not, and the original JOKER in the loose was a far too great threat to overlook. With such a wrench thrown in their plans, there was no telling how they would react.

More importantly, there was no telling what Nyalathotep would do. Would he mark Jun as well…? Claim ownership of him?

He shook his head. The rumour curse had a Read-Only label on it. He and Reiji Kido also had the Grima Patch on them, for good measure. Masakado had definitely applied the Grima Patch on Jun as well. They would be fine. He had to believe it.

He drew his katana and sneaked behind the two guards guarding the entrance. There were no security cameras. Perfect.

He struck.

It was blindingly fast, and perfectly clean, the way only endless practice and experience could achieve. Not a single drop was on the ground. He summoned forth Apollo and burned their bodies. With the strength he had acquired over the loops, turning bone to ash was no struggle. He quickly swiped all the dust that had remained with another Persona that he had obtained in a Castlevania loop; Persephone.

He had no idea why Persephone in the Castlevania branch was armed with the skills of a ninja and the vacuum cleaner of hell, but he would take it.

Tatsuya was usually extremely flashy in his infiltrations. Fast and furious, with an unhealthy amount of explosions that left behind equally unhealthy amounts of questionable gasses and radiation. However, this was a rescue mission. Eikichi was in here, alone and defenseless, there were dozens of prisoners that were experimented upon, Maya-nee and her group had to retrieve important data and his enemy still had no confirmation that he was there. He had to be quiet.

Being in a branch where the most powerful local loop-aware entity wanted to destroy humanity sucked. He really felt for the others in Amala. Thankfully the loops had taken "His" ego down by a peck, if only for the fact that he was actually *not* the most powerful force in reality. Technically, Nyarlathotep answered to the Nuclear Chaos aka Azathoth but given that said being had been sleeping for eternity, "He" treated his so-called mission on Earth like something between vacation and a power trip.

Tatsuya gathered his wits together. He had a job to do.

He flicked his Zippo. *Be safe, Jun.* He entered.

[Persona 2]
Tatsuya's Awakening – part 2

Author: me

Almost an hour later, the newly re-formed trio had finally headed back to Seven Sisters High. Tatsuya dreaded what he would find there.

"*The Seven Pleiades set the frozen time free…"* The first line of the Oracle of Maia had been fulfilled when he was not even looking.

Sure enough, the entire school was out at the courtyard. However, the atmosphere was somewhat different. There was a hint of… excitement? Just as he was about to grab the nearest student and ask them what was going on, an underclassman literally jumped on his face.

"Hey, Suou-sempai! Have you heard? There is this whole bunch of Miss Saeko's old students that came to kick our awesome Principal's ass! I'm rooting for them, but I really hate them too…"

And thus the clock tower *shattered*.

"Aiya!?"

To the shock of absolutely everyone, the clock tower that would toll the bells of doom exploded in a magnificent display of fire, glass and concrete, shattering several windows and making the students and staff run for their lives. The dust and debris slowly settled, and all the passersby collectively held their breath. Silence reigned supreme, only interrupted Principal Hanya landing unconscious in front of the gates from some place above.

And on top of the collapsed tower was none other than a very triumphant Yukino Mayuzumi, surrounded by literally every St. Hermelin graduate Tatsuya knew of. He could even vaguely make out Akinari Kashihara's ghost in the background staring at the group slackjawed.

"HOW DO YOU LIKE *THAT*, **HAMYA**!?" She turned to the others. "Alright guys, we're done here. Let's go tell Miss Saeko."

"…" *what*

Eikichi, for once, looked completely neutral. "Your school is weird."

Instead of listening to him Tatsuya bolted for the tower.

…

Yukino looked down at Sevens' courtyard. She could see all the students staring at her and her former classmates with various expressions ranging from awe, to disbelief to anger. She spotted Lisa and Eikichi staring at her the same way all the other children did.

And then she saw Suou. He looked… puzzled… And there was this weird look in his eyes. He was staring intensely at every single one of them, lingering at herself, Kei and Eriko, and event taking some time to observe the ghost behind them.

Realization hit her. *Shit. Suou is looping.*

She turned to look at Hidehiko – the only one Awake – for confirmation. He seemed to read her thoughts. "That brat down there seems like your kind of tough guy, huh? Why don't you go have a chat with him?" Sure enough, Suou had already bolted from his position and headed straight from the school, skillfully avoiding all of the rumble and the unconscious Hamya.

Hidehiko was right. It was for the best if she chatted with him personally.

Yukino turned to the ghost of the teacher behind her. He seemed to have calmed down from his initial shock. It was strange to think of a ghost that way but in the end he was still human. Even the dead could form an opinion.

If anything, she felt like she owned him an apology. "Sorry for bothering you like that. I didn't expect the the tower to collapse like that." That was the truth. Her intention – other than kicking Hamya's ass – was to destroy the clock mechanism of the tower to prevent the Oracle of Maia from starting up. Utterly wrecking the clock tower… was overkill.

The ghost of the teacher shook his head with a kind smile. "You don't have to apologize, young lady. The clock never started moving, and now it never will. I can rest at peace now." Yukino nodded her thanks.

"Still…" whined Hidehiko "the repair costs will go off the roof now. Heh, get it?"

"Your joke was horrendous, Brown" said Nanjo. "And besides, the cost of the repairs is trivial."

She could practically hear Reiji's "for *you*".

Yukino did not pay them any mind. "I'm going to meet up with Maya-san. We still have to finish that interview. I got to deal with that guy who's heading over here too."

"I also have a photo shoot to catch", said Eriko. "See you later, everyone!"

One by one the adults headed off the school. Yukino took a deep breath.

Suou's looping... This was going to be a trip.

…

Tatsuya ignored the protests of his friends and run up the stairs, not talking to anyone. He made sure to take a different staircase than the one the other Persona users had – he was not sure why he did that but it was healthy to have a degree of paranoia. Necessary even.

Soon enough, he made it to the fourth floor. Yukino was standing there, alone. Akinari Kashihara's – Jun's father – ghost was nowhere to be seen.

"Suou." Yukino's tone jerked his spine to straighten up. It was commanding. She stared at him right in the eyes, unflinching and dead serious.

She knows… There was no doubt in his mind. She recognized him. She knew what was going on. She was merely looking for confirmation.

"Yukino-san."

Yukino's stance visibly slackened, but she did not relax.

"Shit. You're looping too, huh? I guess I should have seen it coming." *Looping? Is that the strange phenomenon that Philemon mentioned? He did say that other Persona users had reported it. Of course it would be Yukino-san and the others.* He expanded his senses, looking for Yukino's signature. In the original timeline she had given up on her Persona, but he could not think of anyone else that could have caused that geyser of fire he saw earlier.

The wave of power staggered him. His eyes widened in shock.

The most powerful presences he had ever sensed were Philemon and Nyarlathotep. However, among the Persona users in the end it was Tatsuya himself who had the most raw power… Until now.

Yukino's magical aura, her Persona resonance, was *crushing*. He could not imagine a human having this much power. The amount of fighting she must have done to grow this strong…

…must exceed that of a human lifespan. His mind was spinning.

Yukino had definitely noticed Tatsuya's awed gaze. She smiled at him. "Gather up your friends. We'll deal with all the emblems and then we'll go to the Velvet Room. I'll tell you everything there."

…

About an hour later, after the squad had destroyed the rest of the emblems and Maya-nee fended off a band of zombie junkies thus awakening her persona – Tatsuya had no idea how Jun managed to get his hands on that many zombies – he and his friends had gathered in the Velvet Room for some down time. Eikichi, Ginko and Maya-nee were engrossed in the Persona compendium and bombarded Igor with questions about how the specifics behind each and every one of them. Igor for his part, along with the other residents in this place – looked very amused by their enthusiasm. However, Tatsuya could not help but note how the long-nozed geezer kept throwing knowing glances at him.

He should not be surprised, really. Even without Philemon telling him so, it was obvious that Igor would know about the time travelling.

Yukino drew him to a corner of the room – if it had anything that qualified as a corner and invited him to sit.

"Alright Suou. I'll tell you everything but it's a pretty long story. I didn't get it at all when I first heard it. We don't have that much time so now I'll tell you the basics and fill you in on the details as we go."

Tatsuya nodded in understanding.

"First of all, have you ever heard of Yggdrasil?" Tatsuya lifted an eyebrow at the somewhat unfamiliar term. He was pretty sure that he had seen the term at some point in the compendium but he really could not say anything more about it.

"According to Norse mythology, that is the tree that holds all the worlds including ours. That tree is real, but it's not actually a tree."

"What do you mean?"

Yukino took a deep breath. "Yggdrasil is actually a super computer. Each of its branches is a different reality. Ours is the Persona sub-branch, which is a part of the Amala branch. Amala has all the demons and magic that you know, but it's made of many different realities. In some Tokyo gets nuked, in others Earth as we know it just isn't there, some have the Jewish God duking it out with Lucifer and I've heard some stuff about aliens of all things… But we all have more or less the same demons and the same magic. We are the only ones who use Personas though. Philemon and Nyarlathotep's power extends only in the Persona branch. You follow?"

Tatsuya took some time to shallow all this. It made sense, in a level… It reminded him of some scientific theories he heard about now and then. About there being many different realities and dimensions.

He nodded. Yukino took it as a signal to continue. "Good. The problem is, at some point Yggdrasil crashed. I have no idea how – nobody really does – but now the Admins, those who control Yggdrasil, are trying to repair all the damage."

"So if Yggdrasil is a computer, reality is program that has been damaged…" It made sense. It made sense but it was just so crazy and Yukino had not answered anything yet. "What does this have to do with the time travelling?"

"I'm getting there. In order to repair the worlds, the Admins forced their residents to loop. They have to repeat the events of their lives over and over again. We are free to change things, but all the changes will be gone once the loop resets. We're called loopers. The only thing we get to keep is the power and knowledge we obtained. We also have some extra perks I'm going to teach you about, but that's pretty much it. Oh, and the terminology too."

"…Terminology?"

"You want a break?" That look on her eyes… She could tell exactly how scared he was, couldn't she?

"…No…"

Yukino was uncertain but she continued. "Each branch that's looping has one to three Anchors. Those are the loopers that are always Awake no matter what. With no Anchor the loop crashes. Our anchor is Igor. The rest of the loopers activate depending on how good friends they are with the Anchor, and this goes on. Not forever, but some branches have a crazy number of loopers. In this branch all of us who dealt with Kandori and the Snow Queen

are looping. There are others in Amala as a whole, but we are the biggest group. We actually have the most loopers."

Tatsuya was surprised at that. "You mentioned many realities…"

Yukino was suddenly very hesitant. "The rest of Amala… isn't the best place to keep friendships. Anyway, sometimes we're looping in other branches and other times loopers from those branches loop here. Those are fused loops. You follow?"

Tatsuya nodded.

Yukino-san grinned at him. "Heh. You're good." She took a deep breath and continued her explanation. "If the events go exactly as you remember them unless you change stuff, it's a baseline loop. Sometimes things get a bit messed up even without the other branches. There was this one branch when the school's traditional play was "Summer Night's Dream" instead of the "Snow Queen" so we ended up having to fight the Fairy Queen instead of Nyx. There are many funny changes like that – and some not so funny… Those are variant loops." By this point Tatsuya could not help but smile himself. He remembered Yukino-san being so insecure about her intelligence, but now she was lecturing like it was second nature to her.

She's sounds like Miss Saeko… Yukino had done some growing as well. She looked far more confident now.

"As for the tree itself… There are the Admins. They're in charge of the branches and do all the coding. They can also decide which people are allowed to become loopers and which are not, and they do all the coding and debugging. The one for Amala is Masakado."

Tatsuya recognized *that* name. "The protector god of Tokyo."

"Yeah, though they're not the same as our gods. The Admins are much more powerful. The there's the Hub. That's pretty much the tree's trunk and the only place that's not damaged."

"The trunk… the part that's holding everything together… What exactly does it do?"

"This… will be difficult." Tatsuya raised an eyebrow. "The Hub isn't looping, but its residents know all about us. The problem is…" she took a deep breath. "As far as they're concerned, we are works of fiction."

Yukino-san stopped talking, waiting for her statement to sink in.

Tatsuya's head was spinning. *Works… of FICTION…?* "Fiction…?"

"In the Hub, Amala is known as a video game franchise called Shin Megami Tensei. The same goes for every branch. To the hub they're movies, books, comics… Variants and crossover loops are fanfiction and "what if" ideas… They record everything without even knowing it."

"You can't be serious…"

"Sometimes we loop into the hub… Apparently it is just like the Persona branch sans magic. In other places the difference is much more drastic."

"…I see…"

His thoughts were all muddled. He felt like everything was buzzing, he was trying to distinguish all the information he had gotten and it was impossible for they had blended together like liquid. He tried to think and he drew static.

Yukino looked at him with understanding. "I'm kinda impressed Suou."

Tatsuya turned to the older woman stunned. "Huh?"

"You're taking this a hell lot better than I did. I was screaming my head off to Igor. Didn't get that shit at all." She blushed a little. "I was not exactly mature about it…"

Tatsuya chuckled a bit, startling Yukino. "Suou? What's wrong?"

"You've become a pretty good teacher, Yukino-san."

Truth be told, he always thought she was a good teacher. She had taught them everything; how to fight, how to keep their cool under all situations. She was a teacher to them alright. Yukino was properly blushing right now. After all, becoming a teacher like Miss Saeko had been one of her dreams, even though at the time she thought that she would never smart enough to accomplish it.

"D-Don't call me 'sensei'."

Tatsuya chuckled.

Maya-nee's voice interrupted them. "Hey, Tatsuya-kun! Yukino-san! What are you doing over there? Hurry up, we have some rumours to chase!"

The two fire users shared a glance. "Ready to go, Suou?"

He smiled and got up without a word.

Maya-nee was right. They had some rumours to chase.

I wrote everything in this chapter

[SMT IV]
Variant: APOCALYPSE – part 2

The talks that took place a couple of days later were hell. Or heaven. She had stopped trying to tell them apart even in her baseline. The point was that Isebau had been running around like crazy in that time without ever actually finding something to do. The children – Asahi and Nanashi – that had been involved were nowhere to be seen after the incident, but somehow they fended off Shesha. To be able to stand up to such a beast… To obtain this much power in such a short period of time was astounding.

Before her stood the angels that wore the skin of her best friends. *And they looked the exact same as they always did and it was completely wrong.*

Jonathan had the same polite and pleasant expression that he always did, but any warmth that once rested in his eyes was gone, leaving behind something completely foreign and outright inhuman.

Walter still wore his Samurai uniform in the same unruly way as always, and his lips rested on a casual sly grin. But that smile of his no longer held the goodwill that he once had; it felt nothing but arrogant.

They were gone.

They were gone but accepting that… It was impossible. They had both tried, herself and Flynn, to get their two friends to loop for as long as they were Awake. Yet in spite of all the power they gathered, the two of them would always perish. From sacrificing their souls and bodies to a spare bullet to a plague that had once harvested Tokyo with no warning, they two of them would always die in a completely unfair and often horrific manner. They had never given up on saving them, but seeing the results of their failures…

Even through all the loops, her anger, her sorrow, her frustration… They were always the same. If anything, the loops made it grow even stronger as she kept on discovering all the cruelty that her fellow loopers and their whole branch had to suffer at the hands of the gods that toyed with humanity's fate.

Order against Chaos…

Isebeau had finished reading that manga that she was looking for all over in her baseline ages ago. "The Rose of Versailles". Beyond the beautiful romance was a story about how Order and Chaos when taken to the extreme could both lead to destruction. She had found out later on that the war in the manga had actually happened. Humans had fought wars like this over and over and over again but they never understood how wrong this was…

If she thought about it too much, she would shut down. She almost did, on a few occasions.

Flynn… Flynn had saved her. Most of all from herself. And now he was taken by madmen. Well, gods. It hardly mattered. Isebeau wanted to break down.

If not for Fujiwara and Shins being in the same room, she *would* have broken down. Especially when they had asked her to *introduce* them.

Introduce them! The abominations that had taken the bodies and souls of her friends! To her it did not matter that Jonathan and Walter had given their souls on their own free will; the times that they had all fought together were important to both her and Flynn, even though the two had yet to recall their endless struggles through the Loops.

She tried to keep her voice steady as she told their old names in front of the camera. She was interrupted by none other than Merkabah.

They both shredded their disguises. To be honest, she was somewhat relieved at that. She could look at them without thinking of the people they wore as costumes.

In spite of Merkabah's ever present serenity and Lucifer's ever present arrogant smirk, she could tell that they were both… nervous? Yes, they were nervous. They would have never expected a legion of half-forgotten gods to declare war on them both, much less a group that could *pierce through the firmament.* Even though Isabeau had seen and heard of several similar displays of power through the Loops – the Reapers' energy beams and the rumors about the Gurren Laggan loops came to mind – this was not a looping entity. It was something that by all means appeared to be native to Amala itself; to this very branch.

And worst of all, she had no idea if this was merely a variant or – Masakado forbid – a *baseline expansion.*

Amala has to find SOME way to make our lives miserable, she tried to joke with herself. It did not work.

Lucifer of all people had requested a *ceasefire.* The fires of Hell had most certainly frozen over. Even more surprisingly, Merkabah *agreed* with the statement. They even offered to dispatch their elite Samurai units.

And then Lucifer declared that he would lead the people of Tokyo to battle. Now that was more of a regular situation. Naturally, both Skins and Fujiwara protested at that, only to receive a revelation that shook them to their very core.

Humans can kill gods and demons, while gods themselves could not. And the humans who could kill *any* being were called Godslayers.

Isebeau did not find herself to be truly surprised at this revelation. Gods and demons being unable to kill each other was something that had been debated in Amala for quite some time now. The title itself seemed obvious.

Yet how permanent was this death? Aleph had killed YHVH yet everybody knew how YHVH had cursed him afterwards. That alone was proof that His death had not been

permanent. However, Merkabah and Lucifer appeared both implied that it was possible to erase gods and demons from existence.

The two beings soon launched into another argument. They did not even try to hide how they would eliminate humanity the moment it was inconvenient to them. Fujiwara called them out on this; their silence said enough.

Isebeau could feel her blood boiling. It was a very familiar hatred. She managed to keep expressionless through it all.

Lucifer and Merkabah ignored the hunters and ordered them to defeat Shesha and rescue Flynn in accordance to their respective wishes, vanishing before the humans present could manage a response.

Skins was left shaking with fury. Fujiwara ended the conference. Isebeau was lost in her own thoughts.

The only way to discover the secret behind this mysterious loop was to retrace all the hints she had from the start – the first sign that this loop would be different.

She had to find Asahi and Nanashi.

[SMT I]
(no title)

"Futsuo..." asked Steven in his ever polite manner. "May I ask what exactly did you have in mind?"

Futsuo for his part, was awkwardly rubbing his head. "Isebeau told me that they have a constant problem in their branch with the Reds and the general lack of magnetite, so I tried to use that infinity bullets trick in our COMPs to mass produce it."

Steven rubbed his chin. "I see. While that would certainly prevent demons from losing their sanity and consuming humans en mass, I believe that moderation in the production is most vital in this case."

"I'll make note of this. However, it'll take a while before I modify the program. I am afraid that any glitches will make the problem worse."

"I can modify it for you, if you'd like me to. One of us will need to contain the damage regardless, and you are far more used to direct combat than I."

Futsuo shook his head. "My own demons have also been affected by the magnetite. I am not helpless but such a large horde is more than I can handle."

Steven's glasses shone ominously. "In this case, I will take care of them. Please be quick."

"Right."

The young programmer immediately pulled his hyper advanced laptop from his pocket and started working on his COMP. Steven rolled his wheelchair to the heart of the problem, and started up his own computer.

"Well then..." He set up Singularity Hailstorm.

And came face to face with a mob of angry citizens defending a mountain of Maras.

...

"I suppose this is better than last time. Much easier to contain, at any rate."

"Steven, I am *made of magnetite.* Do you know how difficult it was to convince my demons that I'm not edible?"

[SMT I]
(no title)

Futsuo slumped in the bottom of the prison cell, glaring at the wall as if it were responsible for all the problems in the universe.

Yuji was staring at him concerned and with no small amount of fear.

"You are Futsuo, right? I saw you in my dream." The demon summoner nodded in confirmation, but did not actually reply.

"What is the matter?"

Futsuo took a deep breath through his nose before exhaling. "Have you heard of the demon summoning program?"

"I think so?"

"While I posses it, I was not able to negotiate with *anything.* All the demons have lost their FUCKING MINDS!" Yuji jumped back. "I try to talk to a pixie and she tried to make me confess my sins, the Jacks are acting shy, the ghosts are dead set on protecting all the flowerbeds in the world, the kobolds and whatever other demons are running a charity for the well-being of pagan deities, and I saw a bodyconnian drowning her sorrows at the bar! I don't know what's going on anymore!"

Yuji blinked several times. "The charity is a good thing..."

"NO." Yuji promptly shut it. Futsuo took several deep breaths, before he slowly calmed down. "I'm sorry. I usually don't act like this..."

"It's alright. We all grow frustrated at times."

"I know soneone who can answer why this keeps happening. He should be in the Echo building. Let's escape from here."

…

Yuji waited patiently as Futsuo talked things out with the man in the wheelchair. Frankly, he was still confused, but at least Futsuo seemed to follow Steven's explanations well enough.

"I am afraid that Ambassador Thorman decided to fire the ICBMs rather early. Thankfully, I was able to use the terminal technology to redirect them out of earth's atmosphere, but not without some... unfortunate side effects."

Silence.

"Steven... *What did you do to the moon?"*

[Persona 2]
Jun's Awakening – part 5

Jun could not shake the feeling that there was something terribly wrong. From the moment he entered he could sense something not physical saturating the air and clinging on his skin. It was as if the air, the walls and everything around his was trying to split and merge with itself at the same time. He passed in front of the mirrors and the picture frames and his reflection was playing tricks with him.

So this is the Kimon Tonkou formation… Tatsuya had described it to him to the best of his ability, but Jun did a bit of researching himself. It was a Feng Sui technique that trapped the victims in the mirror world and the only way to break it was to pass through eight gates that were determined by the caster. The gates themselves were marked by talismans in the real world which were numbered by the Ba Gua system.

Passing through the gates was one way to break the seal. The other was to tear apart the talismans before the spell could activate.

I need to find the gates and do it ***now .***

Jun headed towards the nearest recording studio, his sixth sense on the highest alert. If that Shiki Wang Long Chizuru brought here spotted him, it would be over for him.

Unfortunately, the Sumaru TV studio was built like a labyrinth. Thankfully it was nowhere close to as bad as the sky museum with its horrendously – not to mention borderline illegally – placed staircases but finding one's way was still a struggle if they were not well acquainted with the interior. Jun was, but still…

Sumaru TV was built like a maze. Its monochrome grey walls differentiated only by the posters here and there. The first floor was an absolute mess of boxes, packages and all sorts of random stuff that simply got in the way and blocked half the entrances.

The seal hasn't been activated yet… I must avoid triggering it at all costs. How do I trigger it?

The Shiki was obviously the answer to this question and that troubled him more than he'd like to admit. The mere fact that Wang Long Chizuru was able to conjure one in the first place was nothing short of amazing. It spoke of a highly experienced and talented mage, and quite possibly one who did not need to abide by their – Amala's – preferred magic system.

Actually facing a genuine witch in battle… It was so rare that it may as well be an honour of the highest order.

But that sort of thing is very common in the loops, isn't it? Tatsuya might have fought against so many mages and witches that he lost count of them…

Something about the thought made him feel tiny. Here he was basking in the novelty of fighting a witch while for his closest friend – no, *more* than that – it was already an old hat. He had to fight those demons and abominations countless times, over and over again, and then more…

…what have I done to him in those times…

He picked the Adonis flower from his pocket and gave it a sniff. However the scent did not provide him with any comfort.

I am becoming distracted.

The Shiki was a problem. It could take any form it wished, including insects and people that he knew. He could possess them even. Jun had to make sure not to be seen by anyone and anything.

Do not let yourself be seen by anyone who can report it later. And get rid of the evidence. Tatsuya's first rule of infiltration. The implications were unpleasant.

The dressing rooms were on the second floor. It was not quite as chaotic there but it was full of people. He knew that Chizuru was currently on one of them.

His mother was also there, as well as Lisa-san…

No. I cannot drag them into this. I already did so once… This is why I'm here, with Tatsuya… Think Jun… Where could she have put the talismans?

Unfortunately for Jun, he never had that much interest in Chinese or oriental in general magic system, always having preferred the Western ones for their exoticism and clearly defined and multi-faceted archetypes. His father's interests had also played a role in this.

Regardless, the problem was that he did not know as much about Wang Long Chizuru's magic as he should. He never thought that he'd come to regret his utter devotion to his previous fields of study.

It was pointless to scold himself now… He had to think practically and find a solution to this problem.

The keyword here was gates. Eight of them. *That is the number of the recording studios in this place.*

The closest of those recording studios was on the second floor. Right next to Wang Long Chizuru's dressing room, in fact.

As much as I'd rather avoid that, I am running out f time. He had to destroy that talisman.

Trying to make as little noise as possible, he swiftly ran to the second floor and approached the gate.

It was a trap. He had absolutely no proof for this but it was definitely a trap. There was no way that Wang Long Chizuru would leave her formation unguarded with enemies like Tatsuya running around. He stood in front of the gate and mentally counted from three.

Three.

He could sense Kirishima-san's Persona a few meters away.

Two.

He checked his surrounding one more time to ensure that the hall was clear of obstructive objects.

One.

Kirishima-san knocked the door to the dressing room.

Zero.

Jun ripped the talisman. The spell shattered as soon as it manifested.

Here was hoping not to die. In fact, he could already hear the Shiki from Chizuru's room screeching in rage, as well as Kirishima-san's surprised yelp. Without thinking Jun entered the studio and slammed the door behind him.

The studio was dark… Jun's night vision had never been as good as Tatsuya's who could see almost as well as during the day, but his sense of wind currents made up for it on a certain degree.

A mewl caught his attention.

He did not need night vision to see the pair of feline eyes eying him.

It can teleport too… The door behind him was locked.

He tried to play clueless. "A cat?"

The Shiki studied him for a long moment. Its eventual response was not what Jun quite expected but it was not unexpected either. "You were not part of our plans." Of course his

little lie would not work. It was almost impossible to hide Persona resonance from demons.

Jun noted that it was impossible to define its voice; demonic voices naturally had many layers but this here sounded more like a choir, only far less grandiose. It was probably due to the Shiki's ability to shapeshift.

He had to lie, obviously. "Your plans?" He pretended to be confused and a bit surprised, but not too much. Someone aware of demons would not be too surprised by a talking cat, after all.

The Shiki narrowed its eyes at him. "Why did you destroy the talisman?"

"W-Well… It's some sort of a spell or a seal, right? I like fortune telling, so I started looking into Wang Long and Feng Sui once it became popular… I think the talisman is part of a seal or something like it? It didn't seem like good news, that is all."

The demon continued to stare at him distrustfully. Jun just hoped that he could bluff his way out of this.

He severely doubted it.

…

Tatsuya could tell by resonance that Eikichi was already here. Of course, he was not looping or even remembered the events of the baseline. However, his friends still had their Personas even in this reality, dormant but existing. Their presence was just barely strong enough to give them a few elemental resistances. Tatsuya had found out as much through some less than pleasant loops.

Going by the previous loops, Eikichi out to be in the prisoners' cells by now. He would not have any problems handling it. He had already called Anna Yoshizaka earlier that morning and told her to keep guard in the Velvet Room at the Narumi ward to guide in there the many visitors that were about to come.

He hated having to involve innocent civilians in his affairs, but Sudou was going after Yoshizaka in every loop and even when Tatsuya got to him first, he still seemed incapable of avoiding her. Regardless, she was involved, she knew he was not the Tatsuya she knew just by looking at him, she knew he had a job to do and she had her priorities straight. Her help had been too valuable to reject, and the door to the Velvet Room was invisible.

Step one; clear the path for Eikichi.

That was easy. Unlike Anna, he did not even have to cross paths with him; he'd just take out any guard that would go check the commotion at the cells and leave Eikichi none the wiser.

He did not have to worry about any potential demonfied humans either. The only one here was most likely Sugimoto. Maya-nee and his brother would take care of him. Shiori-san was not captive either.

No, the reason he was here was completely different than in baseline.

He had to know "his" moves. He knew Jun was looping now. They had some sort of a stalemate so far but now "he" would undoubtedly make his move. Tatsuya had to get leads, and the only place was the wolf's mouth.

Takahisa Kandori.

…

Perhaps the Shiki was nervous? Jun had just thrown a nasty curveball with his presence. In reality, he was nervous too. Kirishima-san was just outside the door and was currently trying to unlock it. It was only a matter of time before she would lose her patience and broke into the room with her Persona. If it were between him and her, he would have been able to lie to her and ease her suspicions. However, with Shiki in the picture this chance was next to none.

The broadcast would start in a few minutes. He had to leave this room and stop Chizuru *now*.

Right on cue Kirishima-san started knocking on the door. "Hello? Is anyone there? Are you alright?"

That was his chance. He smartened himself up and opened the door. He felt the Shiki dash off somewhere before she could see it.

"K-Kirishima-san!? I was not expecting to meet you here… You caught me off guard…"

"Oh? Are you a fan? It is always a pleasure to meet new people!"

Outwardly, Jun gave her a shy smile. Inwardly he sighed with relief. He was half-expecting she would see through him.

"My mother has a contract here. The actress, Junko Kurosu?"

Her eyes lit with recognition. "Ah, yes! I have met her. She is a very nice woman, truly admirable. So you are her son? You really look like her. Jun, right?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing here?"

Think fast. "I saw this hanging on the door." He opened the palm of his hand to reveal the torn talisman. Kirishima-san's eyes widened in recognition. "I came in here to see if there were any more of these. I figured I clean these while I'm here. The staff is busy enough already."

Kirishima-san put on a strained smile. Jun almost huffed in disappointment when he saw it. As a model she would have to be more convincing than that. Her smile looked so fake that it hurt. No wonder Fuuji-san refused to take her in photo shots.

"I will clean up the rest of them, OK? I'll be passing by the studios anyway. I still have some time before my turn on live TV comes. Will you be alright?"

She had to be referring to those demons he spotted at the edges of the hallways. They had all kept a good distance from him, sensing the difference in power. "Yes, thank you."

This was perfect. Kirishima-san would keep herself busy while he went on to interrupt the broadcast. She would quite possibly run into the Shiki, but that was none of his business now. She was an experienced Persona user; she should be able to handle it herself.

Making sure she was out of sight, Jun ran straight to the studio.

He had a fight to prepare for.

...

For a very long time, something was wrong. Strange dreams had been plaguing his dreams and haunted him when awake. Always different yet always repeating, their themes and faces were the same with little variety. One would think that he was not the kind of man to be bothered by such things, but he was not like the other men of his caliber. No, he was a class on his own and he had experienced things that very few had, so he knew better than to dismiss dreams as just that.

The god was whispering somewhere deeper than his ear, laughing, the voices full of promises.

He promised him power.

He had power. A lot more power than he should. Power he did not need. Power that in the end served as little more than a trial for those that did the actual work.

He promised him knowledge.

That would have never lured him when he was younger, more naïve to the ways of the world yet enjoying the challenge that it offered. Now perhaps he would have accepted, but that pride he had acquired back then would not allow him.

He promised him authority.

What a joke. There were men and women following his orders, but he might as well be a prisoner with a crown.

He promised him to fulfill his dreams.

But he no longer cared.

He promised destruction.

That was the one promise he could certainly keep and he had proven as such. Multiple times. But in the end, that too was meaningless.

The bright lights of the sterile lab were dulled by his black shades. The Tenzou soldier next to him was throwing him nervous glances when he thought he was not looking. All of them did.

No matter. They were just more faceless pawns in this cosmic game.

"You." The first word that had been said in hours. It almost drew a yelp out of the soldier. "Have you piloted any of the X-series robots before?"

"Only in test runs, sir." His reply was swift and to the point, clearly trying to remain professional. Just as expected.

"Go to the elevator entrance. Inform me right away if you hear anything squeaking. Don't try to fight. It won't help you."

Ignoring the soldier's sputtering, he went back to playing with the baoding balls in his hand.

The… visions, for lack of better term, were hazy. Imprecise and unclear, as seen through a cheap kaleidoscope gazing through the mist and trying to make out the bird in midnight, a song recorded by a gramophone which was then broadcasted by a radio station with shoddy equipment and received by a stereo with broken speakers in a apartment with bad reception.

However, the samples were many. Slowly but surely he was able to create a concrete image and make out the lyrics.

Very well. He could play his role…

Again.

[Digital Devil Saga]
Random snips

"Lupa… There is someone I must meet as well. I fear that her despair may destroy us… I must stop her before that happens."

Lupa stopped walking at that and turned to look at Gale. "You speak as if this woman has an influence over the Junkyard." The cold and cool-headed strategist of the Embryon nodded, but remained silent. Lupa was beyond confused and slightly alarmed at this. "Who is she?"

Gale opened his mouth to answer but Heat interrupted him.

"His psycho ex-girlfriend."

"She's Sera's mom an' dad too" added Cielo.

"She also created the demon virus" said Argilla.

"That was sort of partially my fault", finished Serph.

"Affirmative on all accounts except the last".

Lupa suddenly felt severely out of his depth.

…

Naoki Kashima had seen his fair share of massacres – most of them caused by him – and the Junkyard provided more than enough bloodshed for his millions of years but this… Well, this was definitely new.

When he heard the pounding and screaming coming from a room not too far away from the tiny chamber he usually found himself in, he burst through a few walls and found himself in a modest throne room covered in blood. Tiny pieces of grey armor and flesh had been stuck on the now crimson walls. Somewhere in a corner were the remains of what appeared to be an oversized fur coat.

And in the middle of the chaos was the Embryon tribe, hunched over an amorphous, gigantic lump of flesh.

They had also started a fire for some reason.

"What are you guys doing?"

"Meatballs."

…

"Uh, Sera? Why are you a kid?"

Sera had never been tall, but now she barely reached Cielo's hip. She also had the most adorable puffy cheeks, big beady eyes that melted your heart and was dressed in a makeshift dress with a big orange bow.

"I guess this is a variant? I don't rapidly age in this loop so I don't need the EGG quite as much…"

Cielo's face lit up. "Dat's great news! Well, you can't fight but you got all dese cool powers so you'll be okay!"

Sera still looked concerned. "Yes…"

"Hey, what's de matter?"

"Heat has been avoiding me for some reason…"

Cielo's brow furrowed. "Dat's not like him."

"He turned red as soon as he saw me and ran off. I know he's Awake, so… I think Serph is looking for him."

Seeing Sera so worried, Cielo went to assure her that they'd figure it out but a loud yell interrupted them.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WHY!? *LOOK AT HER!* SHE'S A KID! I FEEL LIKE A FUCKING FREAK HERE! AND SHE'S ***CUTE!***"

"…"

"…"

"Well, dat got way more creepy."

Sera laughed nervously. "Hehe… sorry?"

[Digital Devil Saga]
Roland's Anti-climatic Awakening

Roland shook the whiskey in his glass, watching it reflect the dull light of the monitors. His Atma brand was pulsing with bright yellow lightning.

"I don't know why I'm time travelling all of the sudden, but I'd rather we don't make a big deal out of it. That would only end in a disaster that no author would be able to finish writing."

The door burst open and Adil ran into the room. "Roland! Somebody blew up the Karma Society headquarters!"

Serph face-palmed. "Dammit Heat…"

Roland downed his glass. "See what I mean?"

[Persona 5], [Yu-Gi-Oh! ARC-V]
Not Who He Was Expecting

This was it.

Once again, the Phantom Thieves were standing at the top of Tokyo right on Christmas Eve, the crowd far below standing in the hellish landscape that was Mementos.

Summoning Satanael on full power was always a challenge in spite of how far into the loops Akira got. Even with the real Igor's assistance, Sinful Shell was almost unachievable until that very final battle against Yaldabaoth.

Yet he had done so many times…

He focused all of his rage, but something was different this time… *Far too different.*

"Behold…"

The voice echoed far and wide, deep and menacing. Utterly unfamiliar.

"**THE SUPREME KING DRAGON ZARC!**"

[SMT IV], [Digital Devil Saga], [Persona 2], [Persona 5], [Strange Journey]
Flynn's Fundraising Campaign

"**Very well. I promise to not execute you**."

The demon – no, the *god* standing in front of the poor soldier was beyond intimidating. Vishnu made for an imposing figure, looking like a human yet taller than any, with three swords in his arms and a lotus in the fourth, skin engraved with gold.

"**Under one condition**."

The Junkyard soldier was too terrified to argue. He instantly nodded, and prayed to God that it would not be something too horrible.

"**Hand me over your tag ring**."

Silence reigned supreme.

"What?"

"**Your tag ring. This is where all the Maka earned in your battles is stored, is it not?**"

"Yeah, obviously-"

"**Then *hand it over!***"

"HIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-!"

From a distance, the Embryon tribe awkwardly watched the scene unfold.

"Woah. He not be jokin' when he said he'll take all de mony."

Argilla nodded slowly, as dumbfounded as Cielo was.

Heat growled in annoyance. "He's wasting time…"

"One must wonder if he realizes that by sparing his enemy he loses the amount of Maka that will be added in his own tag ring."

Sera was just chuckling uncontrollably during the whole thing, almost losing her balance. Serph caught her just in time.

Soon Vishnu, now turned back into a green-haired Flynn, returned with the enemy's tag ring in hand.

Gale repeated his previous statement. "You do realize that by sparing your enemies no further Maka will be added to your tag ring."

"That is why I took measures to obtain it."

"Explain."

"Since tag rings record Maka depending on the victories achieved by their wearer, a set of two rings should record twice that amount. Am I wrong in this assumption?"

Sera, still giggling, shook her head and proceeded to explain. "Sorry, but each tag ring is connected to its original owner. You can't use that one."

Flynn's expression slowly changed from satisfaction to panic, and then outrage. "All that effort was for naught!?"

…

"I want your yen. As much as you have."

"Waaaaah! Mister, you're scary!"

Flynn did not have the patience to deal with a crying Moh Shuuvu. "If you give me your money I'll depart immediately!"

"Somebody help me!"

"Hands up, this is the police!"

Flynn almost dropped his sword in surprise. Behind him he heard the sound of a gun being loaded. He slowly turned around, only to see a young man in a grey suit with red sunglasses, waving a badge at him.

Flynn could sense immense magical power from him. He tried pinging. Going by the other man's reaction, he was a Looper too. He did not lower his gun.

Flynn tried another approach. "I know how this must appear to outsiders, but I am in grave need of funds. My home loop has particularly steep prices."

"This is robbery, assault, and child harassment! Well, I guess I should also arrest you for breaking the law of swords and firearms, but it doesn't matter much in Sumaru…"

Flynn could not believe his ears. "She's a demon! Surely you can see this!"

"It's still illegal! You're under arrest!"

…

"Show us the money."

That loop, Yusuke had been replaced by Flynn, and it turned out that the Looping samurai had a gift for infiltrating Palaces. As well as some other stuff.

"We know you posses more funds than this."

"This is all I have!"

"We know you're lying. *No target of mine is so poor*."

Crying, the demon dug in whatever it had for pockets and dug in more yen.

Akira and Flynn had teamed up to extract as much money from the demon-shadows as possible, and the rest of the Phantom Thieves could only gaze in awe.

"Holy crap!" breathed Ryouji. "That dude's more like a thief than any of us!"

"We know, Skull" replied Ann. "We know".

…

"Listen", said Langdon for the umpteenth time. "Maka is an energy source. We need it to power the Red Sprite, and we need it to make new apps. We can't just give you all of our money."

"But I am in great need of it!"

"Ask the demons!"

"Very well."

Jimenez chose that exact moment to burst in the room. "Did someone plan to mug the demons? I'm in."

"Well Flynn, off you go."

[Digital Devil Saga], [Persona 5]
Screwed Priorities
Status: REJECTED (The content is problematic, I'm sorry for this)

Ryuji had no idea what exactly he had done in his life to deserve this.

In this loop he had been stuck in the worst branch he had ever seen because he had replaced a guy named "Cielo". Just because they were both Lightning users. It turned that the "Junkyard" was part of the same larger "Amala" branch that *their* branch belonged to and yes, it was about just as bad everywhere else.

He still had nightmares about that first… rampage.

And now this was going to give him even more nightmares.

"OPEN THE DAMN DOOR! OPEEEEN!"

The door in question was steel with heavy bars. It was a prison cell.

This was a prison. And a meat processing factory. And the jailer was some skeleton horse thing with a trashy hat that was… *thrusting* in all the wrong ways and wanted to eat them for dinner.

That things steps were shaking the floor and he could feel it coming closer…

Receiving a scared cry of "mommy" he ran to the next door, ignoring the protests that "wait, that's the wrong way Ryuji".

"SOMEONE OPEN THE DOOR!"

A deep but effeminate voice rang through the closed door. "Well well, what a handsome young thing. Going my way, sailor?"

"What?" No. Wait. He knew this. He had seen this in baseline. He knew exactly what that guy wanted. He remembered the gross shirts and the lipstick and…

"I WON'T BE MOLESTED! I'VE HAD ENOUGH!"

"Wait, you handsome, after this I'll die! It's my only chance!"

"Hell no! Stay in your cell!"

A *really* deep voice laughed. "So should you!"

He turned around. He can face to face with a blue bone pelvis. He looked above and saw the horse head.

"Shit."

…

"How many times do I have to bust you out of this cell!?" The Lokapala mole in the prison was beyond exasperated.

And so were the others. "Ryuji can't handle queers."

"*That's* your issue!?"

[SMT IV]
Variant: APOCALYPSE – part 3

Finding Asahi and Nanashi proved to be easier said than done. The Hunter's Association made things somewhat easier; they requested a special sword – Ame-no-Habakiri – that was hidden in a place known as the Fairy Forest. Given how the kids had defeated Shesha the first time, she was certain that they would go after the sword as well.

There was a second quest about finding the components to build a radar capable of tracking Shesha. Thanks to the Loops, Isebeau had already created an installed a program in her

Gauntlet that allowed her to do such a thing. Unfortunately, she had no data on Shesha, and therefore she was unable to track it.

The whole situation felt like the first time she went to Tokyo. The very first time, before the loops, when she was completely in the blind and had no idea what to do next. At least in the loops they could base their actions on previous experiences or ask the local loopers and follow their loop memories. Here, no such luck. In spite of everything, she was on square zero.

One of the many problems was that she had no idea where this Fairy Forest was. The second was that the Association needed her. The demons grew wilder than ever, now that there were so many factions battling it out. Isebeau at this point could obliterate any demon within seconds with pathetic ease. In fact, they made a point to avoid her at all costs, so they pretty much assigned her on guard duty.

Isebeau *despised* guard duty. Defending the civilians was a matter of great importance. However, getting to the bottom of this mystery was even more so.

And as if all that were not enough, Merkabah announced that they would be sending their elite Samurai units from Mikado. That announcement came as a major shock to everyone. Isebeau did not know the situation in Mikado. The loop usually ended earlier than that. The time difference between Tokyo and the surface appeared to have vanished as well, at least going by the sunlight.

Still, years had passed up in Mikado and according to the rumours… Arrogance ran deep in Navarre's family. At least Gaston was putting some real effort.

However, arrogance had a steep price, and Gaston's thirst to prove himself while rejecting help from all and refusing to give credit where was due left the other Samurai disgruntled. They were already talking about ditching him.

Poor him, but he probably needed that lesson.

And worst of all, there was absolutely no sign of the kids.

Until they came back with both the sword *and* the radar parts, that is. With Nozomi in tow. And an odd-looking boy in an expensive suit that screamed "Asura-kai" and a sports jacket that screamed everything but. Isebeau could feel their inhuman auras from across the room, even though she had gotten no such feeling from Nozomi before.

This loop was just getting weirder and weirder.

And Flynn was still absent. The Divine Powers were still absent. Only Shesha haunted the skies and Isebeau was *alone* here and she had no clue what was happening.

"Something wrong, Miss Isebeau? You're so pale, young lady!"

Isebeau was startled out of her thoughts. Above her was Dr. Matsuda, his remaining hair flying in all directions, with a cup of something mildly unappealing but warm clutched in his

hand. Another person she had never met before, but Fujiwara trusted him, and he was one of the sharpest people Isebeau knew. Only someone who had proven their strength could wear a Hawaiian shirt in the middle of an apocalypse.

"My apologies, just… There are many thoughts in my mind right now."

"Perhaps I can help you untangle them! I'm pretty good at thinking, if I say so myself!" The scientist's enthusiasm was infectious, and Isebeau could not help but crack a thin smile herself. To her surprise, he offered her the mug, "Here. Not as good as the stuff up in Mikado I guess, but it sure hits the spot!"

Isebeau took an experimental sip. Sure enough, it was horrible; it burned her tongue, someone had mixed a ton of sugar (probably made in a lab) with some other spices and a grind of *something* with a grainy texture and poured hot water into it. There was a strong metallic and chemical tang in it. But all of that was part of the course in their Tokyo. Isebeau ignored the taste and focused on the thickness of the drink and the warmth in her throat that travelled all the way to her stomach. She took a few more sips, and basked in the warmth.

"Better? I told you it hits the spot! Quite useful for pulling all-nighters, let me tell you!"

Isebeau was actually smiling now. "Indeed it does."

"Now, what bothers you."

Isebeau took a deep breath. Where to even start here. There were so many things she could not tell him but… Maybe talking to a stranger would do her good, for once.

"I feel so… lost. Flynn always had the answers to everything, but now he's captive and we have no leads… And we know *nothing* of these Divine Powers other than some legends that probably don't correspond with the current events – if anyone even *remembers* those legends – and all the work is done by a few *kids* who should never have to do this while I-I'm just *stranded* here unable to act…!"

A hand landed on her shoulder, cutting off her impromptu rant. Dr. Matsuda had a sad smile on his face, and the contrast with what little she had seen of his usual attitude was so great, Isebeau was stunned into silence.

"I think you should put some more faith in those kids. I've never seen so much promise in someone, let me tell you! They work pretty quickly! And effectively! Sure, standing here is pretty horrible, but right now, if you sun in you'll make things worse. We need your strong and stable presence, and you need to let those kids grow. We'll save Flynn, you can be sure of it."

Isebeau contemplated his words. She was the anchor. Before Flynn Awakened, she had to stand by and watch so many times because she knew in her mind that something needed to be done. All she could do back then was prod Flynn to the right direction, the Neutral path, where they could save the most people.

And now, she would have to do the same. That boy, Nanashi, had power. Strange and dark power that she did not like one bit, yet he surrounded himself with brilliant friends and Isebeau feared that the pure contrast would crush him – if the weight of the responsibility bestowed upon him did not crush him first.

"Hey, don't break the mug now, you'll burn yourself!"

Isebeau was startled out of her thoughts. She looked at her half-full mug and saw that thin cracks had appeared in it. Sheepishly, Isebeau loosened her grip and took another sip. The strange sugary liquid had lost some of its flavor on her burned tongue, but the warmth was still welcome.

"Well?" Dr. Matsuda was looking at her expectantly.

"I think… I have reached a decision now. That you, Dr. Matsuda. I needed to hear that."

The smile he threw her was brilliant. "Any time, Miss Isebeau! Any time."

[Persona 2]
Jun's Awakening – part 6

Eriko Kirishima knew that she would not have a good day, but this was worse than she imagined.

She had gone in the TV station expecting to sneak into a changing room, go through someone's bag and phone and maybe cause an "accident" to interrupt a broadcast that may or may not promote the interests of the New World Order. What she got was a crowd of rabid fans, a surprisingly large number of demons for such a crowded space and a torn seal for a Kimon Tonku formation.

In other words, Chizuru Ishigami planned to trap anyone who would get in her way into another world and leave them to the demons, even if she took completely innocent people along with them. Normally, Eriko would give half her salary for a chance to see the mirror world, but not when other people would be harmed by it. Good thing that Jun boy had found the talisman in time. Now Wang Long Chizuru would not be able to activate the seal unless she made a new one.

That was one concern out of the way. Eriko hoped that Jun would not run into any demons and just go back to his mother's dressing room or the reception area. What a kind boy.

The downside was, when Wang Long Chizuru realized her spell had been ruined, she would *not* be happy. Eriko quickly pulled out her cell phone and dialed Brown's number.

"Hey, Elly! Got any good news for us? Yukino-san and I ran into every demon in the building here! That Wang Long Chizuru sure is bad news."

"It's true… She set up a Kimon Tonku formation in the building."

"A what?" As Eriko was explaining the details behind it and what their next course of action should be, she felt a cold shiver going through her spine. Someone was watching her…

…

Tatsuya could feel the empty yet oppressive aura of Kandori's lab as soon as he stepped in it. A faint smell of death penetrated the walls. Carefully, he expanded his Persona's aura, trying to pick up as many people in the building as possible. Eikichi was, as he predicted, already here, his dormant Persona stirring up slightly once he felt his presence

Many, *many* prisoners. Most of them JOKERS, a few half-demonized already. He figured from the presence of the guards earlier that Maya-nee and his brother had not gotten in here yet, and so far it seemed to be true.

Tatsuya cut off his search and suppressed his Persona's aura before Kandori would spot him. It was quite likely the man already knew he was here, but Tatsuya did not want to risk it. He had proven to be unpredictable before.

Most demons made a case of avoiding him as much as possible. That was good. Tatsuya was in no mood to activate his Persona; not until he ran into Kandori himself. The downside of becoming as powerful as he was was that everything could pick up his presence from a mile. Doing anything magic-related would give him away for sure.

First off, surveillance room. Take out the guards and cut off security. Then, containment room. He had to clear the way for Eikichi to move the prisoners. Tatsuya pulled out his phone and sent a message to Yoshizaka.

"*Going in. There are many prisoners here; I think 30 or so. Can you handle it?"*

A few moments later he received a message back.

"*I got Noriko to help, but it'll be tough. Are you sure the police won't stop us?"*

"*Too busy with the broadcast. And the higher ups shouldn't be let them get here anyway. They'll only show up after the shooting stops. Just get them to the Velvet Room before that."*

"*The one in the hotel. Got it. Send me a message once you get there. I'll be by the parking lot. Don't get killed."*

"*I won't."*

Taking out the few unsuspecting guards was almost pathetically easy. A good bash in the head was enough to knock them out for a while. Tatsuya destroyed the surveillance monitors and used his gun to destroy the cameras. He had gotten it after a few loops for good measure, and while he had not used it much he made sure to put a silencer on it. Better than to make noise and spread his fingerprints everywhere. Besides, the way Sumaru City always was in the loops, nobody would think about an unregistered gun twice, no matter its caliber. Shiori-san practically had a hand-canon in her pocket, and thanks to his Persona Katsuya could fire

through walls with his basic service gun. He hoped Nanjo and the other St. Hermellin grads were smart enough to bring their guns too.

With that task done, Tatsuya hurried to the containment room. He hoped Eikichi had not been caught yet. This tended to happen in most loops, leading to either Tatsuya or Maya-nee and the others having to rescue him. For now Tatsuya would just clear the way before searching the building for him.

He hoped *Jun* hadn't run into too much trouble…

•••

Jun was sure he would reach the studio where the broadcast would take place in record time, but that was proven *not* to be true. Between the few demons who were stupid enough to challenge him (not much of a challenge, but still time consuming), dodging every single of the panicking staff members and keeping an eye out for both Shiki and Chizuru, it took him around fifteen more minutes than he initially thought it would. In spite of the delay, Jun wasn't really worried yet. The broadcast was not scheduled to start for another ten, and there would definitely be some delay. All he had to do was sneak into the room and sabotage the equipment…

He quietly opened the door and froze.

The Muses were already here.

For a few moments Jun and the three girls (Lisa! It was truly Lisa!) just stood there staring at each other.

"Wh-Who are you!? We're not giving autographs! Leave, or we'll call security! You're not allowed here!"

The voice was not Lisa's. It belonged to one of her friends. That was enough to surprise Jun out of his stupor.

He took a whiff of the flower in his pocket. He had to focus.

"Is the filming crew here yet?"

"Oh, you're part of the staff? Why didn't you say so?"

"No, I'm not."

"Huh!? Then what are you doing here?"

Why had not Lisa spoken yet? Jun turned his gaze at her, and his breath was caught short. She looked *devastated*. Her normally lively eyes were just – dead.

"Lisa- em. Miss Silverman? Are you alright?" He *had* to ask. Was she Looping? Why was she like that?

Lisa met his gaze. "I- I'm fine. Thank you."

She was not fine. She very obviously wasn't. Her friends were looking at her worriedly too. He could not just leave her like that. Jun took out three flowers of the bouquet he brought as ammo and handed one to each of them.

All three of them just stared at him confused. "They're dill flowers. They signify protection from evil… Those are strange times, so I hope they'll help you, at least a little."

One of the girls snickered slightly. "That's why you have a whole bunch of them? You give them to all the girls you fancy?"

"We're pretty famous, you know! Can't blame you if you like us, right Sheba?"

Jun smiled thinly. "I'm sorry, but I don't swing that way." The girls – Sheba and Miho, now he remembered their names – looked startled.

"Thank you. Really."

Hearing Lisa's thanks, Jun smiled gently. She seemed just a bit brighter now, clutching the flower like it could crumble at any moment. "You're welcome."

"Um, what's your name?"

So she was not Looping after all… Her behavior was far too different from the Lisa he knew. He thought about it for a moment. "Jun."

"Well Jun, what are you doing here?" The girls again. "You said you don't work here, right?"

Jun took a deep breath and steeled his resolve. This was going to be tricky. "We need to stop delay the broadcast."

Going by their expressions, this was *not* what the girls were expecting. Jun was not surprised. Lisa looked more curious that shocked though.

"What- *why!?*"

"Wang Long Chizuru is *dangerous*. You know about the –JOKER cases." Just saying it was difficult. "Whatever she says in this broadcast, it'll be about Kegare and the JOKER and everyone will take her word for it and it'll only make things worse. She only adds fuel to the pyre and the public will eat it all up –*especially* since it's broadcasted. People will believe *anything* the media say and then word of mouth will wrap it beyond recognition

And *that's* the power of the JOKER."

"Wow, aren't you laying it a bit thick here?"

"No, he's right."

Both Sheba and Miho turned to Lisa in astonishment. "Wait, you actually believe that?"

"I do." She said that with so much conviction that her friends promptly shut up. "Wang Long Chizuru never has a good thing to say. And… what he's saying about word of mouth… the *rumors*… I heard it before, somewhere. I'm sure it's true. So I believe him."

She looked at him resolutely, and Jun was reminded of his own Lisa. He nodded at her.

"Alright. Here's the plan…"

[Digital Devil Saga], [Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS]
(no title)

When he woke up, Yusaku noticed three things:

First; he was completely naked.

Second; he was next to Ai, who was in his human form and also naked.

Third; they were in the middle of a crater.

He sent a Ping, and instantly got back several responses. In fact, going by their speed, he would say they were right next to the crater. Seconds later, a number of individuals in grey clothing leaned over the edge.

It was raining. The ground also felt… odd.

"Hey guys…" asked Ai "are we in an artificial reality or something?" Oh. That would explain it. Ai was better at detecting these things.

The group – compromised of a pink-haired woman, and men with hair in the shades of grey, red, blue and green exchanged surprised looks.

"Yeah! You guys okay down there?"

"Just get us somewhere dry please…"

…

"So you guys are new?" The Embryon tribe and the unique-looking duo had now gathered back at the headquarters, dressed in dry clothes, and grabbed the chance to talk in private.

Yusaku and Ai both nodded. "We're from the newest expansion of the Yu-Gi-Oh branch" said Yusaku.

"You're anchoring it, right?" asked the silver-haired man, Serph. "Since you're replacing our anchor."

"Both of us do! Yusaku and I are co-anchors!"

"By the way, why are we in an artificial reality?"

"You cannot access your loop memories, correct?" At the green-haired man's – Gale's – question, they both nodded. "This happened to our anchor, Sera, in baseline. She was unable to recall the events that happened prior to her waking up here."

Yusaku nodded in understanding. "Is there anything we need to know?"

"Well, dere is Atma, but you guys won't get it…" And so the blue-haired guy, Cielo, launched into an explanation.

…

"Wait."

Surprised at the interruption, all the loopers stared at Ai.

"You're saying that *even the real world* is made of data in this branch? And you can *read* it?"

"Well, the Cyber Shaman can transfer data from God and back and she can understand him too…"

"And we're replacing her."

"Ja."

"And God is sending data on Earth *constantly*. Which turns people into stone."

"Yeah…"

The two co-anchors exchanged a long look.

They both spoke at once. "We need to test something."

The Embryon was suddenly extremely worried.

…

When he woke up, Yusaku noticed three things.

First; he was no longer in the same loop.

Second; he and Ai, along with the Embryon tribe were wearing school uniforms.

Third; there was a paper note at their feet.

Groggily, all the loopers gathered around the note.

"*Just because an entire branch is digital, it doesn't mean you can HACK IT TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF THE PLANET. Your admin talked to you about this!*
And hacking Amala is a SUPREMELY bad idea!

Masakado, Admin of Amala
On behalf of Thoth, Admin of Yu-Gi-Oh"

Argilla looked at the note in disbelief. She then looked at the two co-anchors.

"You guys got warnings like that BEFORE!?"

"Told you we'd get stuck in Eiken…" grumbled Heat.

Ai just shrugged. "At least we were on the right path?"

Yusaku suppressed a sigh. It was one of *those* loops.

Start of Thread 3 and The Edit (segment.2)

[SMT IV]
Variant: APOCALYPSE – part 4
Author: me

After Dr. Matsuda's admittedly much-needed pep talk, Isabeau decided to take a more proactive role in keeping an eye on these kids. Fortunately, Fujiwara was always close by when one needed to ask questions.

So she asked him which area were those kids from. Even they had to return to the Hunter's Association once in a while. Kinshicho was a bit far from their base, but that was no problem for Isabeau.

And then the loop threw yet another curveball at her.

Someone had defeated Shesha again. Then Merkabah and Lucifer asked for another conference. It was impossible to hold back the shiver that crawled up her spine.

Instead of asking her to attend the meeting in person, Fujiwara took her to a corner and whispered a request in her ear.

Isabeau was out of the gates before she knew it, running through the trashed streets with one eye and ear out for any threats and another on her gauntlet.

The conference proved surprisingly interesting. According to the report, a group of Hunters and Samurai had cooperated to track down Shesha and then defeat it, followed an analysis on Shesha's attacks and skills. Apparently, Shesha would take ages to even get up before attacking.

The serpent sounded strangely… lethargic. Too easy. Isebeau did not like that at all. There had to be more to it, she just knew it. Things in their loop were never *that* easy. She was willing to bet all her money that they would fight Shesha again.

Her whole body was trembling as she dashed through the stairs leading underground.

The conference had just finished so they had to be leaving right *now*, she could not lose them!

She yelled at the top of her lungs, not caring who saw her. "Hold on!"

They heard her. She didn't know who to thank, but they heard her. They stopped just before the elevator.

"Miss Isabeau! It's me, Asahi!" Behind her, Nanashi was waving at her.

The girl's bright smile was enough to make her day. Isabeau came to a stop, trying to catch her breath. Good thing she had practiced so much. "Hello, Asahi. It's good to see you."

Isabeau took them in. The group that defeated Shesha. Astonishing.

Like all residents of Tokyo, Asahi, Nanashi and Nozomi were very pale, though Nanashi took that to a concerning level. Like before, she could sense some strange dark power coming from him, and now that she looked closer, those green eyes could not possibly be natural. Nozomi looked the same as always, but she had an air of confidence and maturity that she lacked before. The Ashura-kai boy that was with them had entirely unnatural colouring, with really yellow skin and grey hair, but otherwise he looked like any other teenager. Isabeau was also astonished to see a young man in a frilly white uniform with a fancy spear. That was probably Gaston. She could really see the resemblance, though Gaston was admittedly more handsome.

"I knew you'd pass this way. I'm glad I ran into you. You are setting out for Tsukiji Konganji, yes?" The question was mostly rhetorical. Fujiwara's orders stated exactly that. Where else would the group that defeated Shesha head to? That said, she was mildly surprised to see that they were using the terminals. "I cannot let you rescue Flynn alone. Permit me to join you?"

Please say yes, please say yes…

Asahi was astonished. "*You* want to come with us? Of course you can! Let's go!"

"Oh… uh… Thank you. I did not anticipate so much enthusiasm." Oh, did she come off as rude? She really hoped Asahi would not be offended.

Obviously it flew right over Asahi's head. "You're always welcome here, Miss Isabeau! I'd fight at your side all day, every day!"

Wow. Was this what having fans was like? Isabeau felt so awkward seeing Asahi smiling at her like she was the sun… But at the same time, it made her feel warm inside.

"I hope I never looked like this in front of Abe…"

Isabeau was suddenly hit with a mental image of the Ashura-kai boy acting like Asahi in front of some cold criminal in an expensive suit. It was so funny she almost missed Nozomi whispering to thin air.

What?

"So, um, introductions? You must be Gaston, correct?"

Gaston so far had said nothing. He only nodded rigidly, with an unreadable look on his face. Isabeau could not figure out if he was relieved, skeptical or disappointed.

"And your name is?"

"Oh, um, I'm Hallelujah." Now this was a strange name, but she did not comment on it. At least she had something other than "Ashura-kai boy" to call him by.

Isabeau had many questions about all of them, but they were running out of time. “Let’s be off to Tsukiji Konganji.”

“Right.” Isabeau was astonished to see Nanashi talk. “Miss Isabeau, what exactly is your specialty?”

“There we go…”

The looper blinked at his question. Her specialty? How should she even start with that? She had looped countless times, learned more magic than her loop had to offer and just as much about the sciences, she could annihilate most enemies in seconds, and suddenly this boy was asking for her *specialty?*

“I… don’t really specialize in something. I am very capable in every field of combat.”

Asahi was in awe. “Really!?”

Nanashi ignored her. “Good. Then we split up. We have sev- um, six people here.” What was that slip-up? “Miss Isebeau, please take Gaston and Miss Nozomi with you. The rest, with me.”

Gaston looked like he was about to protest, but he threw a glance at her and said nothing. Isabeau was staring to grow worried. She hoped he would not cause any problems later down the line.

She was also worried that she would not be able to keep an eye on Nanashi and Asahi directly. Asahi obviously trusted her, and Nanashi probably did too, but she came here specifically to find them. After all, they were the ones involved in this whole “Divine Powers” thing since the start.

The other reason was that she was essentially leaving three kids alone in Ring of Gaia territory, and that was without counting the other unknown dangers they may face.

However, they were strong, They should be fine.

And besides, now they were en route to save Flynn, and she could not be happier.

[Persona 2]
Jun’s Awakening – part 7
Author: me

This fight was a nightmare. Eriko was on the verge of collapsing, holding on by the last shreds of her will.

The moment she finished her phonecall, she was flung into the studio by the man who stalked her, chainsaw in the ready and screeching her name, waving around like the madman that he was.

Eriko had no idea where he came from but she did not have the time to consider it either. She casted all the magic that she could, using Garula over and over in an attempt to blow him away, or at least slow him down.

He was not slowing down. Instead, the pain seemed to spur him and motivate him even more. He was *laughing* and kept saying how *happy* he was that she was *paying attention to him*.

Eriko attempted to sever his knees with her rapier, but somehow that did nothing. How was that even possible!?

He lunged with the chainsaw again and she barely dodged. She was running out of energy. If she fell here, then… Then…

An explosion. Dust. Then light.

Never had she been more relieved to see Brown and his cocky grin.

“The cavalry is here!”

…

The moment Jun heard the explosion he realized that the plan they made had been blown out of the water.

The original plan was as following: they would damage the recording equipment – which Lisa did with a mighty roar reminiscent of her old self – and then they would wait for the filming crew to arrive, at which point the girls would give an excuse about damaging the equipment by accident while practicing. Jun would use the delay to corner Wang Long Chizuru.

Instead, he felt a Persona resonance he didn’t recognize at the place where he abandoned the Shiki and Kirishima-san. Surely, Wand Long Chizuru would go to investigate.

On the one hand, that would surely keep her away from the broadcast, and hopefully keep his own – admittedly minimal – involvement a secret.

On the other hand, could he really leave it to chance?

“Jun!? What was that!?”

The girls.

Forget about Chizuru.

Jun rushed straight back into the recording studio. “Change of plans.”

He had to calm down. He the explosion, the personnel and the police outside would evacuate the building, and Jun was not supposed to be here. Oh sure, he had given an excuse about going in to see his mother, but he hadn’t and if the stories didn’t line up…

There was no way Miyashiro-san would be able to cover for him.

Jun grabbed all three of them and pulled them close. He could already hear the shouting and yelling from the floors below.

“Listen. We are going outside. When the cops ask you, say that you ran when you heard the explosion, and ran into me on the hallway.”

“And what about the equipment?”

Crap, he almost forgot about that. “Okay, then… How about this? Same excuse as before, you were practicing and accidentally damaged the equipment, went to look for someone to help you fix it before the broadcast, heard the explosion, ran downstairs, and ran into me. We’ll go downstairs together.”

“Wait, Jun.”

Lisa. “…Yes?”

“What about Wang Long Chizuru?”

He sighed in resignation. “If I attack her, it’ll raise suspicion. It might even work in her favour…”

The other girls were shocked. “Attack her!?”

“I’ll cover for you.”

Lisa’s declaration stunned them. She looked at him straight in the eye. In that moment, Jun could see the fire she had on the Other Side. “We’ll say that we found Wang Long Chizuru collapsed and injured, and the two of us stopped to help her.”

“Lisa, you want to *help* him!?”

“He’s working alone, isn’t he!? I’m going!”

Her friends were still protesting. “But Lisa, that’s crazy! And I still don’t believe him about her being evil or whatever!”

It was no use. Lisa’s will was as unmovable as the Earth. Behind them, the voices were getting closer.

A second explosion. There was a fight.

“Alright. Lisa, with me. You two, as we discussed. Practice, damaged equipment, left the studio, explosion, we found Chizuru and split up.”

“O-okay…”

The girls ran, and only Lisa remained. “Can you fight?”

“I-I’m not sure… But I’m coming with you.” The steel was back.

“You’ll be fine. But I’m warning you, she’s a witch so keep your wits together.”

The two of them starting running too. Jun spread his senses through the building trying to track her through resonance. She was still here. Good.

“A witch, huh? Sounds like a long story. I guess you can use magic too?”

No point in hiding it anymore. “Yeah. Wind based. Bit of healing.”

“I would like to see that.”

As if answering her prayers, a demon jumped in front of them. “Wow, what’s that!?”

Instead of replying, Jun blasted it away with Garudyne. Its body dissolved. He turned to her. “Gone.”

Lisa just stared. “Well, I got my wish. But the next one is mine!”

Her enthusiasm was infectious. “Alright.”

It was good to have her back.

…

Back in the laboratory, Tatsuya’s progress was going smoothly. He had already disabled most gates, activated the elevator with the key he had stolen from Rasputin in a previous loop, reached the secret floor, destroyed the X-00 mecha that was in the way, kicked the scientists out of the lab and with a well-placed Nova Kaiser, he blew up the equipment.

Unfortunately, it was too late for Sugimoto. He had already been turned into a demon. Not that Tatsuya felt particularly sorry for him. There weren’t many people in the world who were beyond saving, but Sugimoto was definitely one of them. Hopefully Eikichi wouldn’t take it too badly.

A well-placed Agidyne was enough to render the demonic Sugimoto unconscious. He would have to carry him up top, but that wouldn’t be too much of a problem.

His phone buzzed. It was a text from Yoshizaka.

“Your brother and some other people just came. They brought a truck.”

Crap. He hoped he’d be done before they arrived. *“Did they see you?”*

“No”

Tatsuya ransacked his brain for a plan. *“If they see you, just tell them you heard about the rumours and decided to check it out. They already know you’re involved with the case, they won’t question it.”*

"Much"

Tatsuya amended the point. His brother was always a mood swinger when it came to interrogations; either he let the subject go or drilled them to the ground, no in-betweens. Perhaps it'd be safer for everyone if he pumped Sugimoto with tranquilizer and stuffed him somewhere where Eikichi or the others could find him.

After that… *"Change of plans. Leave the JOKERS to my brother and the others. You stay hidden even after they leave. If I don't text you in the hour after they leave, get out."*

Yoshizaka's text came almost immediately afterwards. *"What you planning to do"*

Get to the source of this. Kandori. *"Find the guy in charge. He's here."*

"You SURE you can fight him?"

Yoshizaka had seen his strength before. When he stopped Shiori from making that call to end her own life. When he saved Noriko from herself before the Triads could kidnap her again. Little stuff all over the city. Of course, he had never truly gone all out. No looper ever did. Even with his baseline-only abilities, he was more than strong enough to handle anything his native loop could throw at him.

When he had started looping, Nyarlathotep for the very first time took him seriously. The games were over – the Eldritch Abomination had nothing more to hide from Tatsuya, who knew his true form and purpose, and no reason. So instead of playing games with him like he did in baseline, he threw as many of his minions at him as possible to wear him down. Entities that Tatsuya had no means of describing, that defied all logic and comprehension.

Tatsuya made quick work out of every single one of them.

So *He* found other ways to screw with him and slow him down. Messing with his friends, his allies and random people, forcing him into an impossible balancing act because no matter how powerful he grew he could not be in two places at once. Things were always easier when the St. Hermellin grads were also Awake, even if Todou-san, Inaba-san and Ayase-san seemed to be AWOL most of the time, and Kido-san had *issues*, but it was still a stretch.

Kandori was Nyarlathotep's *other* favourite pawn.

The man who had everything and nothing, and seemed to know far more than he had in any right to. In baseline, the man was strong enough to *screw around* with him. Hell, even in the loops Kandori was giving him trouble. Then the man just… stopped fighting him and the St. Hermellin grads started telling tales about increasingly nightmarish and impossible fights.

In other words…

"I can try"

"DONT DIE"

He had no such plans.

[Persona 3]
Another Wild Card Enters The Fray (Elizabeth's Awakening)
Author: Venku

In retrospect, Elizabeth should have known something was amiss when she woke up back in the Velvet Room. The very last thing she remembered was this quaint little side trip to the Inaba region. She just loved sampling the local delicacies. The sights! The smell! While she had to help her former guest deal with a rather troublesome individual in a silly tournament, overall Elizabeth had viewed her time at Inaba to be a pleasant detour from her task.

So why is it that she woke up back in the Elevator, like nothing had ever happened?

Feeling a bit vexed and curious, she approached one corner of the Velvet Room. The Room itself would always shape the interior to match whatever the needs of the Guest require. That being said, there were some things to let the Attendants know basics, like time and date.

Her lips purse in a small thin line as she shook her head. Something seemed way off. Time itself seemed to reset itself. "Wonder what this could be?" she commented idly. Then another thing stood out. She rubbed her eyes before looking at the date again. Surely it couldn't be correct. Surely she read the date wrong.

Nope. In clear script, the time itself read: *April 8th, 2009*

Well. Damn.

Elizabeth stared mutely at the calendar before heading off to prepare for what she assumed would be the guest arriving.

Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, she was being watched. Igor, the Master of the Velvet Room, had noted her strange reaction and had surreptitiously turned his seat to where she would remain in his line of sight. "How curious" the man commented to himself. "Has the Tree decided to act? Has another unlocked their Potential?"

…

Though the guest would never know it, Elizabeth had mixed emotions when he arrived later in the day. It had hurt her heart when he showed. His short, cropped blue hair and crystal blue eyes framed against a sleepy demeanor had haunted her dreams ever since the fated event. She wanted to warn him. To tell him of what was going to happen. And of how she felt about him.

Instead, her lips refused to work when her Master spoke: "Welcome to the Velvet Room, my dear young man. My name is Igor. I am delighted to make your acquaintance"

And when she was introduced, all she could say was "Pleased to meet you."

She wanted to scream in anguish. In agony. Just *why* could she not warn him. And what was going on with her reliving this fated year? Was she being punished for some sin she

unknowingly did?

When the young man left the Velvet Room, Elizabeth excused herself and went to her area. As soon as she left, Igor let loose a long suffering sigh. “Her actions indeed speak of her awakening. But I must not tell her. Not until it is confirmed.”

Curious about his next step, Igor cleared his mind. He pulled out a deck of Tarot cards and began to perform a reading. Of course, the Fool was in the upright position. The next card drawn was the Tower, signifying the start of a conflict. What was drawn next was something which caused the man, the Anchor of the Persona branch, to blink.

Staring as a bright warning klaxon, the Inverted Judgement card was placed between the Fool and the Tower.

“Curious” Igor murmured. “Very curious indeed.

…

Summer. Normally a time where children celebrated their break from school. Adults planned vacation time with their families. The young man and his colleagues went to Mitusur Kirijo’s summer vacation home.

And Elizabeth was doing her absolute best to try to find out what was going on.

Conversations with her siblings bore no fruit. Margaret, while the eldest, was also apparently deep in thought regarding her own concerns. She did not view Theodore’s input as something to pursue, and was grateful that he steered clear of her path. Lavenza, the sweet girl that she was, also stayed out of her way.

Elizabeth was, without a doubt, frustrated.

“Why is this happening?” she almost shouted.

Her actions were noted, and were being closely monitored. Outside of Elizabeth’s line of sight, a blue butterfly floated near Igor. It hovered at eye level and pulsed briefly, glowing bright blue.

“Yes. I am aware of the dangers involved. However it appears that she might yet indeed be Aware” Igor murmured to the butterfly. As it pulsed for a few minutes more, Igor nodded his head. “Yes. Stability will be maintained. But as soon as I can, I will let her know. That I assure you.”

Satisfied, the butterfly flew away as Igor sighed.

…

The loop itself was approaching it’s conclusion.

The Guest, amazing man that he was, had recovered admirably from two separate attacks which would cripple most people. Betrayal from a trusted adult, and from finding out that the

World was slated to end. Itkutski very likely did not expect the blonde haired robot to countermand the orders given, showing signs indeed of a bond of friendship the young man had formed.

The world's fall was handled with grace as he had led his friends to gather their courage and to remember why they fought. As a Persona was a manifestation of a person's will, their ability to handle what life threw at them, the metamorphosis of his ally's Persona to another form spoke well of his ability to nurture and help his teammates with their personal growth.

Nyx Avatar, the herald of the End, was defeated by this young man's party at great cost. Fate had indeed shown its ugly head as the party's reserve was drained. Not surprisingly, the guest had decided to rise and meet Nyx head on.

Igor had opened access via the Velvet Room one last time. "I never dreamed of seeing this card with my own eyes" he had begun, pulling the World Tarot card from his deck. "This is indeed a surprise!". Explaining that the power of social bonds was what had allowed for the young man to rise against the oncoming fate and meet it head on, he dismissed the youth with the standard perfunctory phrase. "Our contract has been fulfilled. I have completed my role as well. You were truly a remarkable guest."

The young man had left and Elizabeth had moved to join him. Damn the consequences, he would not have to sacrifice himself on her watch! As she stepped forward, Igor cleared his throat.

"Pray listen to me before you take another step".

Surprised, as Elizabeth had never heard that phrase before from Igor, she turned around. And was reminded as to why he was the Master of the Velvet Room.

A glowing corona of power enveloped Igor as he held his own book in his hands. His eyes had taken on a somber, yet resolved gaze as he looked at her. "You have truly shown a remarkable potential, Elizabeth" he spoke, voice echoing through the Velvet Room. "And I will be willing to explain what's going on. But if you interrupt what must be, I will be forced to act."

Elizabeth paused, and did the most prudent thing.

Walking over to the chair in front of his table, Elizabeth spoke.

"What is going on?"

…

A few hours passed and Elizabeth cleared her throat. Igor nodded his head, indicating that he would accept questions.

"So to be clear" she replied as she pulled out her notebook from her Mysterious Satchel(™). "The collective unconsciousness on Multiple Realms is in flux. Our administrator, an avatar of the Persona Taira no Masakado, is the one assigned to fix our branch."

“Correct” Igor replied.

“You, as both Master of the Velvet Room as well as Anchor of the Persona Branch will always be ‘Awake’ for when time resets. It will be the luck of Fate if I am or others. And my siblings are not ‘Awake’?” she added. Seeing his nod of agreement, Elizabeth sighed.

“Is there a problem? To be perfectly honest, this can be viewed as an extension of your duties here in the Velvet Room. Even before you began your Quest and achieved your own Wild Card status” Igor commented, as he began to shuffle his Tarot Deck.

“Let’s say that I am filled with perdify and sloth. What would happen to me?” Elizabeth asked. Not that she would be against this adventure, but one must consider all opportunities!

Igor flipped over the first card. Death Inverted. The Fool inverted was placed on top of the card as well as the Inverted Devil card. “Must I elaborate?” he asked. Elizabeth paled and shook her head.

“I should also advise that if you seek to crash these loops, the Administrators would do their best to discipline you for it. One of their favorite examples is a loop of boredom.” Igor shuddered as he had his own recollection of that loop.

Elizabeth nodded once, thinking. “Alright. So I suppose as you know how this will play out, what lessons must I learn?”

Igor smiled. “Come. Let your training begin. And Elizabeth…?”

Elizabeth paused, her eyebrow cocked in curiosity.

“Welcome to the Looping Velvet Room. I am Igor, it’s Proprietor. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

This brought a small blush and smile to her face as they began her needed lessons.

[SMT I]
The Edit – Genesis Brane #1
Author: Venku

There was nothing else which could be said. Regardless of the fact that time itself was looping, Futuso was vexed. If pressed, he would admit that he was more depressed than vexed. The reason why was simple. No matter the cause, no matter the reason, certain actions remained the same. Actions which always resulted in someone close to him perishing.

Yoshio, or Yuji depending on the loop, would always fall under the Messiah Church’s dogma and become their new Messiah. Depending on the course of the loops, he would either be slain by Waruo, sometimes called Takeshi or Tetsuo depending on the loop itself, as the new Chaos Hero and live with YVHW in Heaven or be slain by Futsuo. Only when Futsuo followed the teachings of Tai Shang Lao Jun, the old man in the parkway who first hinted to Futsuo of the upcoming conflict, that Yoshio realized he was set up to fail.

Waruo was a separate matter. Always the one seeking to better himself due to being the proverbial underdog, Futsuo had to admit that there were quite a few times that baseline always led to a conflict due to his arrogance and anger. A prime example would be after the Great Cataclysm and Waruo's demand to fuse with one of Futsuo's base demons. His fate would wind up being the same as well. He would die when the Devil Ring's power was greater than what he could handle, or die at the hands of Futsuo.

Both the death of Waruo and Yoshi paled in response to his mother. Her death would almost always be the same: slain at the hands of a small Oni demon. Yes, he and his friends Yoshio and Waruo avenged his mother by slaying the demon. What normal or sane person would not try to stop the death of his relative, if he knew it was coming?

This was one of numerous questions he had for Stephen. During a recent loop, while Waruo and Yoshio were allowing him some time to grieve the death of his mother, he sought the Anchor out for some questions.

"What seems to be the problem?" Stephen asked, seeing the puzzled look on the other man's face.

"Walk with me?" Futsuo asked. "I'll meet Waruo and Yoshio later but right now I want to stretch my legs to the park where the Old Man was at."

Understanding the landmark in question, Stephen nodded. Both men had their own Comps out to handle any wayward demons along the trek. The walk was in silence, with both men enjoying the beauty of the pre-destroyed world. Suddenly Futsuo stopped and asked a basic question.

"Why do we bother?"

Stephen paused and turned his gaze to the other man. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Why do we bother what?"

"Why do we bother repeating existence?" Futsuo asked. There was a strange look on his face that Stephen never saw before. A look of frustration and confusion.

"I mean, regardless of what we do, nothing changes. My mother..dead by that Oni" he continued, anger growing in his voice. "Waruo and Yoshio falling prey to their manipulations and being pawns of the Gaeans or Messiah Church. Their blood on my hands. About the only *benefit* to all of this is Aoi being with me, and.." Futsuo paused. "And she's not even looping!"

"I see. It sounds as if you're facing what could be soul shattering decisions by yourself. Is that it?"

"Precisely" Futsuo responded. "What's the fuckin' purpose if nothing we do changes? Why go through this if time itself is going to continually screw me over?"

"Careful!" Stephen warned. "What you're referencing sounds dangerously close to Sakura Syndrome."

“I’m aware, thanks.” Futusuo responded. “And while I don’t think that’s quite it..” he paused with Stephen’s level look. “I am also aware that I’m ill equipped to diagnose it. What the issue is, in my opinion…”

“..is depression. I’d wager there’s also guilt with your actions gnawing at your conscious” the other man finished. “I am aware. For the moment though I have no answers to give you.”

Futsuo sighed, disappointed that there seemed to be no answer.

[Digital Devil Saga]
The Edit – Samsara Brane #1
Author: me

In this world, the rain was unceasing. Silver. Dry. *Heavy.* It carried the weight of sins unacknowledged by the static mind, of screams that went unheeded as they escaped the owners’ lips. The rain went unnoticed, as permanent a fixture in this world as the air itself, an element that faded in the useless background. Its waters travelled through thin crevices and artificial channels, never pooling but disappearing into places unknown.

Nobody cared for the rain. It was simply another fixed statistic among the many fixed statistics. A tiny bit of data that was quickly analyzed and tucked in as the background for the grander strategy, of the ever present mission. The significance of the rain paled in comparison to the placement of the rocks and the debris, the measurements between them, the slopes and the cracks. How much punishment each material could take before inertia failed it and it gave way to whatever force was trying to move it or pierce through it.

And yet, all those data paled in comparison to how many bullets were left in the cartridge. Their size, shape, specialization and piercing capabilities.

For this was their Mission. Their Goal. Their War.

Everything faded before the War. Everything faded before the Church. The Tower that reached and surpassed the heavens.

Everything paled before Nirvana.

Even the Hunger.

The Hunger was sudden. The screams no longer went unheeded. They had a deeper meaning that just “injury” now.

The screams meant Hunger. Hunger meant Atma. Atma meant “demon”. “Demon” meant new forms. New forms meant altered conditions. And altered conditions meant that all the data that were previously used were now useless.

Gone were the statics and the fixtures. Atma came with many variables, even its only static – the Hunger – being unpredictable and thus unreliable.

Atma brought a whole torrent of new data. The dead bodies mattered now; instead of being washed away by the rain, they were taken by those sharp fangs and those tongues that cherished the rich and warm blood dripping for the lips.

Existence now had a static other than the War, found in the tearing of flesh, the taste of salt and copper in the crimson liquid that flowed through everybody's veins, what was previously a need that needed to be covered now become a *desire* and a *motive.*

Desires then *evolved* beyond mere hunger; there was a desire for *calm,* and *friendship* and *love* and those came with things such as *sadness* and *rage* and *dreams*. Even old terms had their meanings changed, for War was something more than just a means to an end, there were those who sought out battles, those who *betrayed* and those who stayed *loyal* and those who *no longer cared*, and everyone sought *satisfaction*.

The Dreamers screamed and cried and whimpered, terrified of the Sun.

The rain grew lighter.

And yet all of this paled before Nirvana.

The name of this world was "The Junkyard". The people of this world were divided into tribes. All tribes desired Nirvana.

Only one of them had reached it.

But for the Embryon, the War never ended.

…

They had seen wonders and terrors beyond what the mind – *any* mind – could grasp. They had touched the sun with their feet and they had smelled the sweet scent of the flowers. They had seen worlds far away from this one, wars without war, without missions, without suffering.

The Hunger was ever present.

The War always returned.

Their loved ones died.

That was their fixed data.

…

A young woman was laying in a pool of her own blood. She must have been beautiful once.

…

The young man who had the form of Metatron was clutching the corpse of a beautiful woman in his arms.

…

There was a report from some soldiers sent to scan the sewers. Someone who took the form of multi-headed giant snake and someone who took the form of an angel with metal wings had devoured each other.

A beautiful woman was found dead further in.

…

It was said that the Brutes started executing people to make an example out of them.

A beautiful woman was the first to be executed. A young man soon followed, but not before assuming his Atma form of a metal-winged angel and wrecking half their base.

…

"Unfortunately, while we do have a description for the beautiful woman, learning her name was impossible and thus we cannot identify her."

…

Naoki was in the same room as always, snarling like a beast in a cage, clawing at the walls, his nails dripping blood. He lunged at them and his eyes flash crimson, and they slammed the door behind as they ran.

His screams echoed through the depths of the Citadel.

Jinana died again that day, and Argilla screamed at the world for its unfairness.

The beast that was Naoki was silenced for a moment. He screamed back at the world and the cries echoed.

…

Sera rushed to the battlefield to cease Jinana's hunger-fueled rampage with her singing, but Bat captured her before she could get her song out.

…

"It is with great regret that we inform you that the Leader or the Maribel Tribe Jinana has been devoured by…"

…

"I'll hold it off!"

"Jinana, you can't do that!"

"Just go!"

“You can’t fight it by yourself, it’s too much for you!”

“I can buy you time!”

“But what about you!? We can leave you here, please!”

She smiled. “I’ll see you later, okay? Don’t worry about me.”

“JINANA!”

…

“Jinana won’t listen. We told her a million times that the blood capsules won’t return someone who already lost control of their Atma but she’s still trying to save her people! Sir, I know it’s not my place to say this, but at this point she is becoming a liability.”

“We’ll save her.”

“Sir?”

“We *have* to.”

“R-right.”

…

Sera couldn’t make it in time.

…

““Viking Funeral”? I assume you found a ship?”

“Yes, it is a few miles away from Coordinate 136.”

“Good. But I suggest you don’t spread that name. Varin would understand your intentions immediately.”

Gale appreciated Lupa’s advice. “That is true.”

…

Lupa of the Wolves and the Embryon traded through the Samsara tunnels once more, slowly making their way to the base of the Brutes.

Lupa looked wary, but also curious. “Surprisingly low numbers of guards. I was certain the Brutes had far more members than this.”

Serph answered his unasked question.

“Operation “Viking Funeral”.”

He let Lupa to process the statement for a few moments. The large man came to a halt, his brow furrowed, lost deep in thought.

“If I recall correctly, that is when… when a …Viking died… they set his body in a …ship, set in on fire and let it …sail… That was it?”

Serph nodded.

Lupa laughed. “That’s quite a way to go.”

“How do *you* want to go?”

Lupa stopped laughing and looked at Gale puzzled. “I want to be in Nirvana with my son, obviously.”

•••

“How did my dad die?”

Gale was silent. Fred had every right to know how his father’s second life ended. In every single loop, he would always die, and Gale would tell him the story because Fred *deserved* to know.

“We were on an infiltration mission in the Brutes’ base, by using the underground sewers as a path. However, the leader of the Brutes, Colonel Beck had detected our approach and ordered his troops to attack us en masse. Lupa offered to hold them back by himself, but…”

“But what? What happened!?”

Gale sighed heavily. “Your father always refused to devour other people. He was weak from hunger, and lost control of his Atma…”

Fred didn’t need to be told where this was going.

“You killed him, didn’t you?”

“…”

“Wh-What… What did you do with the body?”

“…In the Junkyard, the data of the dead turn into rain, and are absorbed in the Samsara sewer system, until they end up beneath the Karma Temple where they are reborn.”

“What, so you LEFT him there!?”

“No. We built a boat out of scrap metal, placed his body in it, set it on fire and let it into the sewers.”

Fred blinked in bafflement. “Isn’t that some kind of ancient funeral?”

“It is.”

"…Huh. That's pretty cool, actually. Thanks."

•••

"Operation "Viking Funeral"?"

Gale could not fault Lupa for being confused. The name of the operation only made sense if someone had data from the real world; and on top of that, the name was based on obscure knowledge concerning ancient traditions and customs. Even if someone had access to the real world, this particular information would be of very low priority. The current world had no need or time for such things.

Therefore, he explained.

"There is a large ship several kilometers away from Coordinate 136. The operation involves rigging the ship with explosives and then trapping inside as many members of an opposing tribe as possible."

"Thus taking out a large part of their force at once." Lupa nodded in approval. "It is smart of you to use such a name. It makes it impossible for the enemy to know your intentions."

Gale wanted to scream. He really did. Because the name *couldn't be more obvious.*

•••

In this world, the sunlight was unceasing. Black. Scorching. *Heavy.* It carried the weight of lives forgotten by the minds of the few, of screams that went unheeded as they escaped the owners' lips. The sun was their God, as permanent a fixture in this world as the air itself, an element that dominated in the background. The sun's rays travelled through thin cracks and windows, never granting any comfort.

Everybody was terrified of the sun. It was far more than another statistic among the many statistics. All their data was for the sake of avoiding the sun. The significance of the placement of the rocks and the debris, the measurements between them, the slopes and the cracks, the windows in the buildings and how well they were sealed. How much punishment each material could take before inertia failed it and it gave way to whatever force was trying to move it or pierce through it.

All of this was for the sake of avoiding the sun.

Everything faded before the sun.

Even the demons. Even the hunger. Even their dead. Even the Karma Society.

They had a War. A Mission. A fight to reclaim their lives, and save their children, to make their future better. Therefore, every single bullet, its width, its caliber, its shape, its piercing capabilities and the abilities of the magic crystals sealed in them were all important to know, data that was to be collected and processed.

The rays grew heavier, the weight of stone, and everything living either withered or turned into stone at its touch.

Those who dreamed of the past craved for the rain and the cleansing, hoping for the clouds to obscure the sky again.

Everything died before the sun.

Everything died before Nirvana.

[Devil Survivor 2]
The Edit – Samsarana Brane #1 – Tell me why
Author: Venku

Time itself was a mystery, worthy to be experienced and treasured. That was something Al Sadiq, otherwise known as Alcor or the Anguished One, personally believed. It did not matter if he was acting on behalf of the Shining One, this Hibiki Kuze, or his friends, or with the reset of time and of other branches, as the Anchor of his branch.

It was at the beginning of this loop, however, that Al Sadiq noticed something out of the ordinary. There were only two other pings in response to his own. That was not something which bothered him, as there weren't that many who had shown signs as himself of being Aware of the ebb and flow of Time.

What was unique was who was waiting for him when he descended near the Shibuya 108 building.

"Miss Nitta" Al Saqiq commented with a small dip of his head, addressing her. He was prepared for her normal blush or any other variants to let him know she was not Awake this go round. Having already discussed with the Shining One and the other Loopers the preferred passphrase when they were Awake, he was also awaiting her response as well.

"It is amazing how everything is interconnected" Io began, her normally shy and bashful demeanor missing. Instead her eyes were red rimmed, and showed that she was shedding tears. "And how people can help anchor and steady others. Yes, Al Sadiq I am awake."

The other man nodded his head. Though normally his eyes remained half lidded, they opened wider upon seeing her tears. "Miss Nitta" Al Sadiq commented. "You are crying. Has something so horribly affected you this early in the Loop?"

Io paused before opening a bottle of water. Still early enough that not too much damage had happened, she had already handled the first Septentrione of the batch. With history repeating, and her own Spiritual Energy growing with each press of the reset button, Dubhe and Merak were easy enough to resolve.

Yamato Hotsuin, he of the JPs branch and also Awake upon verification, had run into her with Merak's passing. A brief discussion and verification of needs met was performed, and

Hotsuin asked for her to meet him later on in the day. Supplies were exchanged before he headed off to the Tsutenkaku, claiming he had some business to resolve.

This was explained to Al Sadiq, in between gulps of water. “That does not explain your tears though” he commented, nodding his head in understanding.

“I was getting there,” Io almost snapped as she took a small sigh. “Look. The purpose of the timeline is for the healing of records greater than ours. A super Akashic Record, yes?”

Al Sadiq nodded his head. “That was made clear by the manifestation of a being called Slepnir. He recognized the facsimile of Loki in the Nicaea Application and had elaborated other truths.” Primarily that his was but one of multiple branches, and that it was his duty to shepherd his branch to completion without causing damage. On occasion one of the Administrators would reach out to him for special issues and those would be considered Top Priority.

“If that’s the case” Io began. “Why is it that we have to go through the death of everyone close to us?”

Ah. There we go.

Before Al Sadiq could comment, Io continued her line of thought. “It’s not right, and it’s not fair” she began, venom starting to creep into her voice. “We have been doing this for an amazingly long time and always the same thing happened.” Eyes beginning to glow green as she waved her hand. “If it isn’t some awful variation where Ronaldo or an un-Awake Yamato decided to end problems early with an assault, it’s variations where the Septentriones work faster than anticipated.”

Her hair started to stand on end as she began to levitate. “Hibiki has already had the same issues we have. There have been times where it was him and you, and his hands still dripped blood from the deaths caused. I ran into him when we both were Awake and he was still crying. And you know the worst? The absolute WORST?” she almost shouted. “IS that I STILL CANNOT SAVE MY PARENTS!”

“That is enough, Ms. Nitta!”

Io paused as she heard something rarely heard from the Anchor: a direct promise of violence. The air crackled as an aura enveloped the white haired man before he looked at her for a moment longer. Finally, the aura vanished and Al Sadiq resumed his sleepy-eyed expression.

“I am sorry for losing my temper like this,” the man replied softly. “But you were showing signs of allowing Lugh..and I am surprised you have already summoned him *this early*..to completely possess you.” He paused as she began to speak, only for him to hold up his hand. “Let me finish.”

“You are right, that things are not fair. The torment given to you, Hotsuin, and the Shining One is something I wish truly I could take on myself. But that would deprive you of your freedoms and your chance to grow.” Upon seeing the skeptical look on her face, Al Sadiq

commented briefly. “You must not forget that is why I rebelled against Polaris’s order to wipe out your planet. To give humanity a chance to fight back.”

“Now..” he added. “Asking as someone who is hopefully your friend and asking on behalf of the authority as Anchor, I need you to do me a huge favor.”

“What is it?” Io asked. While subdued, the grief and frustration she felt still creeped across her voice.

“I need you and Master Hotsuin to allow this loop to play out normally. Assist your colleagues in destroying the Septentriones. Allow the Shining One to choose how this loop will play out. Do not crash the loop.”

“And what will you be doing?” Io asked.

“I will be removing Polaris and obtaining access to the Akashic Records. While the ability to edit the records is only for this Loop, the safety of the Throne will permit me to try to send a message to our Administrator. You may have a valid point. And..”

“..by the proverbial word of” and Io finished this with fingerquotes “‘God’, if he tells me to deal then I’ll have to. It’s not right nor fair, but it is something. It’s just I feel fatigued, Al Sadiq.”

“I understand, Io. I really do. Can you do this for me though?”

A small nod before Io slowly sighed and walked away, silently agreeing to his request. Al Sadiq watched her leave. While having no particular close bond with her, he knew that the Shining One cared for her.

Al Sadiq started his path to the Akashic Stratum. It seemed he had a lot to do, and he hoped that he would be able to provide Miss Nitto her answers.

[SMT I]
The Edit – Genesis Brane #2 – Patterns Emerge
Author: Venku

One of the benefits, Steven thought, about how time reset was that it gave him the chance to do things he never could do before. While being confined in the wheelchair due to the demon attack, that did not stop his mind from wandering and exploring. After having his life forever changed by first the Demon attacks then the fact Time was resetting, he made it a personal goal to learn something new every loop. After all, it was said that ‘The Mind, once enlightened, cannot again become dark.’

His knowledge had already paid off in dividends. The COMP program, which was used to harness the Demons and allowed for the young man known as Futsuo and his friends to have a chance of survival, had improved each Loop. Of course, considering that Futsuo was the only one who was looping, he was the only one who had access to it. Still, the ability to store eight demons from the start and an improved Devil Scanner was not something to sneeze at!

Although he would love to work with the Magnetite and reduce the amount needed for summoning and consumption, he knew full well that it was a part of the world itself and something which could not be tampered with. Great mind that he was, Steven knew there were some things he could not change.

With all that being said, Stephen was also keen to notice when certain patterns would repeat themselves in the loops.

One such pattern would be the sheer ferocity of the forces of Law. While Law did it's best in baseline to recruit Futsuo, and he was aware that the man's name changed depending on the loop, it never resorted to some of some of the tactics which were becoming more militant. A prime example of this would be Ambassador Thorman, or the Deity Thor.

Baseline, the manifestation of Thor in this branch, as Steven was made aware of the 'real deal who wasn't amused' by Masakado, would ask Futsuo and Aoi a basic question. Primarily, would they be so kind as to head to the local Japanese Self Defense Force building and deal with Commander Gotou. Privately, Futuso told Stephen he was surprised Thor didn't go "Just kill the fool". Normally after Gotou's destruction, Thor's destruction or the destruction of both, the ICBM's would rain from the sky and start the apocalypse. Before that would happen, Futsuo, and his friends Yuji and Takeshi would be sent to the Diamond Realm by Aoi for their own safety.

What concerned Stephen, however, were some reports of deviations from Baseline.

…

As Futsuo would relay later, the first time upon entrance to the American Embassy, Thor would unmask from his human persona and start swinging his hammer. Futuso later would add that Thorman commented only the following: "Death to those who do not follow His way! Glory to the Thousand Year Kingdom!". Sparks would fly from his hammer Mjolnir, and before Aoi could feasibly trap Thor into a corner so he could be handled, Thor would snap his fingers. An antimagic field would envelop the party, and while Aoi, and Futsuo via the demons he would summon, could handle the magic they were at the end human. A Divine Hammer and both were removed from the Loop.

The second time Futuso noticed something odd and could record it to relay to Stephen, he was surprised at the level of ferocity shown by the forces of Law. After rescuing Aoi from the public auto de fe, or public burning orchestrated by Gotou but engineered by Lillith and the Gaean Church, Futsuo and company were about to go their separate ways when a warning klaxon broke through the quiet afternoon. Looking up, Futsuo could only utter an "Oh Shiiii…" while Yuji was praying and Takeshi was comforting Aoi. The ICBMs from 'Thor's Hammer' would then land and jump start the apocalypse without Futsuo as a fulcrum.

Each separate reportable incident made one thing clear to Stephen's mind. Primarily that the forces of Law, or YHWH's personal armada, were doing the absolute best to remove Futsuo from the game early. Stephen was unsure why that was happening. Normally it was around the time of the Great Flood that Futsuo's selected path was made clear. So why was this happening near the beginning of the loop?

There was one other thing which was concerning Stephen.

When he Awoke, he would have faint memories. Of another man who's path was similar to Futsuo's. A genetically modified human, this man would have to make the same amount of moral choices that Futsuo had to. The world itself was in a worse shape than the world currently. He saw a visual image of a golden pyramid and of others professing a "Millennium Kingdom of God."

Weird. Stephen thought that the Messian Churches were pushing for the Millennium Kingdom in his branch. Was this some sort of future which was to be? Or, and even more concerning, was there a problem with his Branch itself?

These questions were outside of his scope of knowledge. They were also evidence of a pattern forming. Pulling out a notebook, Stephen began to record what Futsuo had told him.

Pausing for a moment longer, he had heard of 'another' who was a Daemon here but had a 'true form' similiar to Masakado. God of Wisdom and Intelligence, Lord of Science and Arts and the Remover of Obstacles, the Lord Ganesha was one whom Stephen had a brief encounter with when he was in a world similar to this.

Recording his patterns and placing the notebook in his Pocket, he pulled out another Notebook and began to write.

To the Honorable Lord Ganehsha.

My apologies for reaching out to you like this. I am Stephen, anchor of the main branch within the Amala branches. Recently I had been noticing a few events which seemed to strike me as out of the ordinary for our baseline. Is there a way you could inform Masakado that I would need to speak with him at his earliest please?

As evidence of situations out of the ordinary, please inform him that Ambassador Thorman has made a minimum of two separate attempts against the other Looper of this branch well before baseline. Baseline would require the Looper to either accept Thorman's proposal or reject his Proposal. Instead, before the option could be made, Thorman does his absolute best to remove the Looper and his colleagues.

Thank you for your time in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you or Masakado soon.

Stephen
Anchor of the Main Branch
Amala Branches

Pocketing the notebook, Stephen sighed. "I hope this reaches him.."

…

Little did Stephen know his would be one of multiple messages sent.

[Persona 3]
A Wondrous Power Within – Theodore's Awakening
Author: Venku

There were things that Theodore knew for certain. Dog food, regardless of what Elizabeth or Margaret stated, was downright nasty. Lavenza always looked up to him as the kinder big brother, even if she sometimes split into two precious and precocious brats. He was also always amazed at the potential that humanity had within it's grasp. That's one of the things that would always be the same, and something he could bank on.

What he couldn't bank on was this strange sensation of Time stuck in a loop.

The last thing, the very last thing, that he remembered was the trip to Inaba. His older sister Elizabeth had left the Velvet Room, the place between the collective unconscious and mankind. That was something which was forbidden, as an Assistant to the Velvet Room was not ever allowed to leave. This concerned Theodore greatly. Upon addressing this with Margaret, his eldest sister, she had advised him to do something peculiar: Collect one hundred cans of soda.

During this collection, he stumbled across other Persona users as well. A white haired mechanical girl and a boy with his dog discussing personal resolve. Other users, including some which had jogged his memory of a school festival. Each had shown a measure of resolve while trying to handle the situation before them. Of the white haired girl and her separate shadow and how this abused male Sho Minazuki was being used by something else. *Some*one else.

Still bound by the rules of the Velvet Room where they can only offer assistance to a degree, Theodore popped out of a coffin where the nexus of power was combined. Offering the coffin door as a connection point between where they were and the top of the building. The last person he would see, though he knew it not at the time, was the white hared robot known as Labrys. He thanked her for showing him there was something he needed to find, and not just his sister.

The tower collapsed and Theodore met his sister Margaret. After explaining how he filled the soda machines with Yen after obtaining the cans, he offered one to her in an attempt to forge a bond. While she was pleased with the lesson learned, she refused to accept the soda for now, encouraging him to return with her to the Velvet Room. Though disappointed for the moment, he did take heart her words and her lack of what could be charitably called vicious teasing.

All this he knew.

So why was it when he Awoke in his room, he checked his personal time clock and it showed the year as 2009 instead of 2012-2013?

"This is confusing" the man replied before he slowly woke. Knowing that he was not yet allowed to leave the Velvet Room, he went to one of the areas cordoned off as he began to think about what might have been.

Unknown to Theodore, there was someone else aware of his situation and his confusion. His sister Elizabeth was what was known as 'Awake' during this time. The only other Ping she felt was that of Igor, the Anchor of this branch. She was currently speaking with him about Theodore's situation.

"Theodore is showing same signs as I am" she replied with a gentle whisper, not wanting to let him know what happened if he wasn't Awake.

"Mm. Be mindful. This is almost the same rules and stipulations placed on us by Philemon. We cannot interfere unless more is known" Igor responded as he pulled out his tarot deck, beginning the reading. The Fool was face up, indicating someone was on a long and perilous journey. The High Priestess was laid out in an inverted manner over the fool. Finally the Tower was lain over the inverted High Priestess.

"Was that a warning?" Elizabeth asked softly.

"You yourself know the dangers of interference. Though I ask you this. Theodore was the brunt of jokes, as was I. Lavenza as well. To what cost did it do to you and Margaret?" Igor asked in a quiet tone, the cards shuffled and placed to the side. He rose before walking to the door, the flashing lights indicating the Guest was arriving. "This is a variant where Minako is the Guest" he informed before walking out the door. "Do think about the reasoning for the Inverted High Priestess?" he asked, leaving Elizabeth alone to think.

...

While Igor and Elizabeth were discussing how much Theodore knew, or did not know, Theodore was currently doing his best to assist the guest. As his Master had already introduced the Velvet Room and the reason behind it, Theodore could do his best to actually look at the young woman. Copper Red hair cut in a very short, almost pixie like cut. A very cheerful personality. Eager to get to know him.

Later visits would allow for them to bond even more as he had made some requests of his own to test her resolve. To test how well her spiritual essence had grown as a Wild Card user. To him, a Wild Card was a special type of person. Everyone had the potential to tap into the collective Sea of Souls. The psyche where gods and devils, angels and demons of every faith manifested to protect the person from things mankind has not handled yet. From Destroyers and others who viewed Humanity as a mere pestilence to eradicate.

It also reflected who that person was, in a way. Almost all of the populace had one such mask. Either of the inner self tamed and accepting of who they were, or the Shadow where they denied their inner nature. There were precious few people who had the ability to have multiple masks.

One such person was his guest before him. And it was a sheer absolute *delight* to be with her again. To assist her in training for what was to come.

And that was the problem. He knew what was to come. The sacrifices she had to make. And how she would just be the Door to stop the manifestation of Nyx to end the planet.

As she disappeared from the Velvet Room, he watched. Biding his time. With the passing of the seasons he knew when he would have to say something. When he would need to let her know the horrible fate which was to befall her. And what he could do to stop it.

With the arrival of the new year, he saw the flashing lights to indicate her return. Today. Today was the day he would tell her. Today he would...

"Dear Brother we ***must*** talk" Elizabeth's voice pierced through his thoughts in a sharp, hot manner.

...

"..I don't believe you."

Theodore and Elizabeth were standing in the middle of the Velvet Room. The room was shaped like an elevator as it was a reflection of the Guest and her journey. And Elizabeth, according to Theodore, was spouting the most maddening nonsense!

"I'm hurt..woe is.." Elizabeth started her dramatic response.

"Save it. Unless you give me one **CONCRETE**" and he emphasized that word harshly "reason why I should believe your far fetched story about our world being a part of some super tree computer and how Taira no Masakado is the one responsible for our existence not going belly up, I will summon Beelzebulb and we *will* fight! This is one time your prank was not and will not be encouraged!" The man's grey hair started to stand on end as an aura of power was building around him.

"That. Is. Enough!" a voice interrupted the rising argument

The clear controlling voice cut through the potentially brewing battle as both Elizabeth and Theodore turned their gaze to the speaker of said voice. Igor was sitting alone in his chair. While his hands were steeped before him, his gaze was on the two siblings, and there was a look of sheer annoyance on his face.

"While I can understand your frustrations.." Igor began, as he waved a hand to cut off Elizabeth's protests. "Do you not think it rude for you to destroy our home in your fit of pique?" he added. Looking at the man for a moment longer, Igor continued. "Elizabeth was telling you the truth. Though he is but a Persona in this branch, all Persona are based on what was believed. And whom was deified, yes?"

Theodore nodded his head in brief agreement, unsure where Igor was going.

"Then whom is to say there is not a real Taira no Masakado." Igor continued. "And whom is to say that he is not responsible for keeping reality together?"

Theodore could not argue the point. He looked at Elizabeth for a moment longer then as the power around him vanished, he commented. "I am sorry sister. I should have believed you."

"No.." Elizabeth spoke quietly for a moment. "No. Master raised a point. Our teasing may have eroded your faith in us." She smiled a bit sadly at Theodore. "Go speak with him. I will

handle your guest for the night if she needs something." And with that Elizabeth went to greet the young woman who was calling to see if anyone was there.

Theodore paused, a bit touched by Elizabeth's reaction as he sat down in front of Igor. "I am sorry.." the man spoke contritely.

"All is forgiven" Igor commented. "There are lessons you need to learn. And there are things I will teach you which will bring down Masakado's wrath. And before you ask..Philemon is not looping though he is aware of them.."

"..and a part of our duties if we are awake is to make sure the loop plays out and does not crash" Theodore replied, earning a nod and a grin from Igor.

"Very good. Very good. Indeed.." Igor replied as he held out the card for the Fool. Placing it on the table as he turned his gaze to Theodore. "You are about to see the potential. For an amazing power sleeps within you Theodore. A power the Loops will allow to awaken. Though before we begin.."

Theodore paused, confusion on his face.

"Welcome to the Looping Velvet Room, Theodore. You have the potential to be an amazing guest."

Later Elizabeth would report that his guest did ask one question. "What is the cause of that amazing laugh? It's both warm and joyful."

Miscellaneous 19 and The Edit (segment.3)

[Persona 2]
Eikichi's Awakening
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

Tatsuya sure as hell did not expect the sight that greeted him this morning.

He Awoke as usual – on his original reality, if the lack of the brand on his forearm was any indication – and went to school as usual. He had Pinged this morning too and got back a couple of responses; one definitely from Igor.

So he dodged his entire family – feeling especially bad for ditching his brother, but it wasn't the brother he *fought* with – and rode his motorcycle to school…

And saw Eikichi "Michel" Mishina crying rivers on his knees.

"I'm so, so, SO SORRY, MIYABI! I-I heard you were at S-Sevens a-and I heard from Jun who heard from Gin-em that y-you've been doing b-bad and it-it was HORRIBLE and it's be-because of me-"

"Michel, calm down please, you're making a scene…"

He sure was. He was on his knees in front of his ex-girlfriend and dear sweetheart Miyabi Hanakouji, yelling stuttering apologies while Jun was trying to calm him down. The poor girl for her part was stunned while a whole crowd of students had gathered to see what the fuss was all about.

This had never happened in the loops before.

Tatsuya left his bike in a corner and easily made his way through the crowd, reaching the center where Eikichi was *still* apologizing to a panicking Miyabi.

He easily pulled Jun aside, and flicked his lighter. Jun tapped his watch in response.

Good. That was their signal. He was Awake.

He leaned to his ear.

"What's going on here?"

"Michel showed up at five in the morning to ask me what's happening…"

"Wait, he's Awake!?"

"Yeah, and he got to my house to find me because of the Joker thing, and I told him that we're back in time and he started asking if everyone was okay and… I didn't really finish explaining."

"You didn't finish?"

"No. As soon as I told him that there's no emblem curse he remembered Hanakouji-san and rushed here."

"…And you couldn't stop him."

"No. I *tried*, but…"

Tatsuya barely resisted the urge to facepalm.

Of *course* Eikichi would do this. *Of course.* His old friend was an absolute sweetheart, and he was an absolute *idiot*.

"EIKICHI-KUN!"

And now Hanakouji-san had thrown herself into his arms crying just as much. Why should anyone expect anything different?

"I-I forgive you, it was my fault!"

"No, it was *my* fault…"

Jun let a heavy sigh. "I wonder what rumors will come out of *that*..."

Tatsuya flicked his lighter. "I give it two hours."

Jun looked at him curiously. "That long?"

"I'm talking about the whole city, not just the schools."

"Yes, you have a point."

Somebody was bound to post about this incident to Baofu's rumor website. Tatsuya could just imagine the flashy wire-tapper chewing his cigarettes in annoyance from his dingy conspiracy room.

Or maybe Baofu would admire Eikichi's guts for actually apologizing in public in the first place. Tatsuya sure did.

"…Should we drag him off?"

"Eh, give it a few more minutes. We still have some time before the first bell."

Yeah. That sounded good.

Tatsuya was *so* glad to have Eikichi back.

[Persona 4], [Doki Doki Literature Club]
Tea Time

Author: Venku

Sayori Awoke. Gathering her thoughts, the first thing she did was to send a ping. Deep meditative breaths to help center herself were started while she awaited for a response. Five responses greeted her inquiry. One eyebrow was lifted as she paused. "Guest loopers." she mused before slowly leaving the house.

Not seeing MC outside waiting for her was different but not worrying. "Variant loop" she replied with a pause, pulling an apple out of her backpack. Nothing else was thought of as she picked out a book from her Pocket and began to read while on her way to school. It was one of the treatise Twilight did concerning Magic and the Multiverse and there were some things which were confusing.

Entering the club room to see who else was there, she paused as she heard whispers inside.

"Aw. C'mon Naoto! They have a cooking stove here. Surely they wouldn't mind if I whipped up a batch of cookies!" she heard a male voice speak.

"Kanji-kun! We're guests here in this Branch." a woman with a rich alto responded. "Shouldn't we wait until we see whom the local Anchor is?"

"Anchor?" the man added with a bit of a small grunt. "Pfft. Fine. Whatever. Freakin' bullshit though because the stove is just TOO CUTE…"

At that bit Sayori opened the door and paused as she looked at the two who spoke. Apparently the person who was supposed to replace MC this loop was a taller man with dark black hair. Broad shouldered with a well defined physique, he wore the uniform jacket draped over his shoulder.

Standing next to him was a smaller woman dressed in a two piece suit. Her close cropped hair barely extended past her shoulders, and framed her face. Though the suit was something one of the male teachers would be wearing, her body was definitely not male. Internally Sayori sighed as she hoped Natsuki wouldn't be jealous of this person.

"Hi!" Sayori greeted the two visitors. Instantly the Face of the Literature Club smiled as she looked at both of them. "I can tell by your speech that time may be a bit off for you. Am I correct?"

Uh..uh yeah." the man replied as he dropped the jacket and began to speak. "It seems like..ah hell. Yeah we're Loopers as well"

The other woman, this Naoto, sighed as she looked back at Sayori. "My apologies. Normally we'd have a different passcode used in case we're in our baseline loop"

"Right. But c'mon. She just outed herself too!" Kanji griped as he paused a moment. "Alright. Damn that seems like something a "Moronji" as Rise-san would say huh." His next words caused Naoto to facepalm. Looking upward at the tree, he replied "Hey you stupid tree! I don't like being forcibly reminded I was a dumbass! Got it?"

Sayori laughed with Kanji's response. "It's ok. We're used to variants as well. One of ours is usually the victim of variant loops" she added. Clearing her throat, she added "I am Sayori of the Looping Literature Club. Our anchor as well as the other members will be arriving soon, if you want to hold off on introductions?" The two visitors nodded her head. She paused as she addressed this 'Kanji'. "And your friend's right. Monika, Yuri or I wouldn't care if you used the stove to bake. In fact..." her stomach growled at the thought. "But our fourth member might beat you on the head repeatedly with her Bakabane."

Sayori, while personally thinking that Natsuki's kanabo name was cute, had seen her utilize the weapon numerous times. For the sake of politeness to the new visitors, the Vice President of the Looping Literature club figured one warning might be sufficient. Anything else would be at the hands of their resident baker.

…

Kanji's sheepish response as well as Naoto's laugh let her know the implied warning and greeting were well received.

…

To Kanji's benefit, when Natsuki arrived she didn't immediately smack him on the head for messing with her stove. She did, however, glare and mutter at him while checking to be sure it still was at the right settings.

When she was satisfied the "idiot" didn't mess with her stove, Natsuki joined the others around a small table. Yuri had already broken open one of her reserve tea stashes from when she visited Iroh in a Loop and was already pouring tea into six separate cups. Sayori was idly doodling on a notepad while Monika was engaged in chatter with the blue haired woman.

Once Natsuki sat down, the blue haired woman cleared her throat. "I do apologize," she began softly. "But if this is the same Looping Literature club I heard about…" and at this the four Dokis lifted their eyebrows as Naoto turned her gaze to Sayori. "...is your animosity with those of my branch related to the Kirijo group or everyone from Amala?"

"Oh yeah!" Kanji chimed in, removing the glasses from his nose. "It's a big deal with the Anchor even letting us know when he checks on us that..." and Kanji cleared his throat. "If you ever meet the Peach haired one, do give a better impression than Kirijo-san's initial."

Sayori's ears turned red for a moment as she idly touched her fingertips together and went "Ehhehhe." Meanwhile Monika just idly sipped her cup of tea while Yuri and Natsuki witnessed the exchange.

After some time passed, Sayori responded. "That depends. Do you utilize your same powers as that..." she paused, looking for the right words.

Naoto's eyes widened for a moment as she bowed in a formal apology. "Ah! It makes sense now…"

"I'm con-OOF..." Kanji began before Naoto elbowed him. She took over the response as she addressed Sayori. "Our Senpai, the one who is the leader in our Baseline, utilizes his powers by smashing a representation of the Tarot card. Another group utilizes the same ability by ripping a proverbial mask off their face. Two other groups just crush their fist in a gripping motion. Only the Kirijo Group utilizes the method which you find deplorable due to your Baseline, I assume?" she finished.

With a small nod of agreement from Sayori, Naoto continued. "Then please accept my apology for my brusqueness and rudeness. I will relay back to our Anchor the reason for your display of pique."

"What did you **do**, Sayori?" Monika whispered as the two visitors conferred for a moment.

"A lady has to have some secrets..heh. But this..." Sayori shrugged. "If they're not all like that branch..." Monika paled slightly as she looked at her second's eyes. The golden tinge against the irises began to slowly fade.

...

After that brief interlude, the remaining introductions went rather smoothly. Even though Naoto and Kanji were still slightly nervous around Sayori, the intermediate group were having a relatively civil discussion.

"I have to ask" Monika commented as she took a sip of her tea. "This is the first time I think I've ran into anyone from Amala. What is your baseline like?"

"That depends." Naoto responded. She nodded to Kanji. "For our baseline we investigate a serial killer that throws people into the TV."

"Excuse me, you said throw into the TV?" Yuri asked. While the group was still getting a generalized feel for each other she had pulled out some needlework and thread. A new hobby she had picked up when she last visited the Hellsing manor, surprisingly at the encouragement of Alucard. What surprised her even more was that Kanji had his own supplies. Yuri, Kanji and Natsuki were currently in a three man group, working on needlepoint and cross stitch.

"Uh huh!" Kanji commented. "See from what Senpai..that's Yu Narukami. Sometimes he's called Souji. Great guy. About my height with close cropped hair. Anyway what Senpai said is that the TV is like a gateway or some shit between our world and the Midnight Channel. Uhh..." he paused as he cursed after stabbing his finger. "Naoto, what did those Phantom Thieves call the Midnight Channel?"

"Gateway to the collective unconscious. Don't worry, I'll take over." Naoto responded affectionately. Taking a sip of her own tea, Naoto continued. "This Midnight Channel, which manifests as Mementos, Monad Mandala and other places in our Baseline connects the collective unconscious with the sea of souls. Does anyone here know of the Sea of Souls or that reference?"

Yuri nodded her head. "I've..heard of the phenomenon. A man who is like a father to me went to school to study psychology. One of the leading theories when he was in school is that according to Jung that there are components to a person. Their ego, or sense of identity. A personal unconscious which will shape that person and is an exchange from their experience and the collective unconscious stimuli which shapes." She took a small sip of her tea, biting back the fact Alucard referenced it as a load of bunk.

Naoto nodded her head. "A Persona, or a mask that they adapt to deal with the stimuli which they face, is when someone manages to suborn their will and realize that they have to overcome their base nature. Shadows are when a person gives rise to their base nature. Our baseline..." she paused for a moment. "Amala has two separate facets. One branch is where Mankind is always under battle from external forces. Angels and demons would use the souls of man as their army."

"But apparently..." Kanji interjected. "Our baseline, the other part of Amala, started off when the two assholes who would have pushed this battle got their asses kicked! So instead of this apocalyptic crap we just gotta deal with murders, death cultists and other rude people!"

Natsuki blinked. "Death cultists?" she asked.

"Oh yeah! That!" and Kanji nodded his head to Sayori. "The Kirijo group had to deal with death cultists which were trying to bring about the end of the world. Their field leader wound up in Baseline becoming a great... Naoto, what was the word?"

"Great Seal." Naoto replied as she watched the interaction.

"Oh yeah. Great Seal. While I can get where it might be offensive..." Kanji paused for a moment as he took a sip of tea. "There's this one girl which had some major issues with depression in her Baseline, and as a Phantom Thief, her and Okumura-san may share your views, Sayori, but depending on the exact nature of the threat..gotta fight fire with fire, y'know?"

"Doesn't excuse it but... I'll accept she had her reasons." Sayori remarked idly. There was something else which was troubling her. "Let's say that Kirijo did her..." she growled. "Her crap. How did you and the other group deal with and get this... Persona?"

"That's... a long story." Naoto replied meekly.

"We've got time," Monika replied.

...

"I see." Monika sighed as Naoto and Kanji explained their 'Awakening' process. "So you had to face personal truths about yourself that you rather others didn't see. And the..." she checked her notes. "Phantom Thieves had to be forced into a position where they either had to rebel against an authority or be killed.

Kanji nodded his head. He was holding the string that Natsuki was using to knit while they were amicably talking. Surprising both the Amala looper and the Dokis, Natsuki and Kanji

were chatting almost as if they were family. Save for the occasional remarks from the tsundere and the hothead, they both found something they could bond over: Cuteness. Kanji had already gifted Natsuki some of the handmade finger puppets he had in his Pocket and Natsuki shared one of her cupcake recipes.

"Yeah that's right," he replied to Monika's question. "Our Anchor... that long nose fellow..."

"Igor." Naoto corrected. She and Yuri were in a separate discussion over the benefits of revolvers, pistols and blades.

"Igor then. And what's with that name huh?" Kanji groused. "Anyway, Igor theorized that separate people required different catalysts to awaken and deal with their Ego. But the Ego had to be dealt with or..." he waved his hand. Unfortunately it interrupted the yarn Natsuki was using, causing her to miss a stitch.

"Watch it dummy!" Natsuki snapped.

"Watch it yourself, you pink haired cat!" Kanji replied. This met with a low warning growl from Natsuki and a small sigh from Naoto. "Kanji kun..." the woman replied softly. "Remember that Koromaru-san and Morgana had to get downright physical with you."

"Aww... Naoto! I can't help it! She's a bottle of badass adorable!"

This phrase mollified Natsuki some, though her cheeks turned pink. "Keep it up and I'll wanna see your Persona buddy!"

"Sounds... Obscene..." Yuri murmured languidly.

Monika sighed. "If you two are going to do that, do it in our Holodeck." she muttered. Turning to Naoto for a moment longer, she smiled. "Regardless. Welcome to the Looping Literature Club. Our baseline is more or less poetry writing…"

"...with a bad dating simulator underneath." Yuri grumbled.

Monika cleared her throat. "Right. Regardless since you're our guests here we can..work on the poetry if you like?"

Naoto nodded her head. The others had picked up that Kanji acted as the beast, or the brawn to Naoto's beauty, or brains. When queried earlier, she commented that save for variants both Kanji and Naoto spent their quality time together. "That sounds..fine. I'll have to say Kanji might not be the best..."

"...that's ok" Sayori interrupted. "Your friend looped into the main character of our baseline. It's..." she paused. "A difficult story on that but I can share if you'd come with me for a moment? And no, Monika... it's a personal question." she addressed the last bit to Monika who looked a bit confused.

"Yeah. Before we continue this, I do believe I have some questions for Kanji as well…" Yuri commented. The purple haired beauty went to where Natsuki and Kanji were bickering, while Sayori and Naoto disappeared to a side room for the moment.

Monika sighed. "I will not pry..." she muttered, while thinking this might be an interesting loop regardless.

[Persona 5]
Eternity
Author: Tetradrachm

"Why didn't you tell us what was going on?" Akira demanded.

Igor met his gaze calmly from across the refurbished Velvet Room, his smile unchanged. "I beg your pardon?"

"You should not speak to my master in such a way—" the unAwake Lavenza began.

"He means me no harm," Igor said to her placatingly. "But please, Trickster, continue."

Akira was still slightly unsettled by the true Igor, even after all this time, which is why it took him a moment to compose his thoughts for his answer. "You've been Awake and Looping every time I have, correct?" Igor nodded. "Why didn't you ever tell me, or any of us, about the Loops and why they were happening? Why did you leave us in the dark until we just happened to have a Fused Loop?"

Igor said nothing at first. "It was needed, Trickster. Do not trouble yourself with it further."

Something in his wispy voice was deadly serious, but Akira didn't particularly care. He'd never been one to give a damn about implied threats. "Do you understand the kind of pressure and stress it put on us? You must, because you must have been Awake the Loop that I had to come to terms with my Shadow—"

"I was," Igor said simply. "And are you not stronger and wiser for it?"

"It wouldn't have happened in the first place if you had just told us what was going on!"

Igor's smile almost slipped. "It was preparation."

When they said vague crap like this Akira almost couldn't tell him and Yaldabaoth apart. "Preparation for what?"

Igor's eyes narrowed. "Picture a void of absolute nothingness. No sensation, no experiences, nothing but the racing of your own mind. Picture it lasting for a hundred billion years, Trickster."

"Is that some kind of threat?"

"No. It's personal experience." Igor sighed and looked as distant as the strange creature could. "It is part of a particularly foul Variant Loop of an otherwise innocuous Branch, and it was the worst experience I have ever had in the Loops. Ultimate and what feels like eternal isolation...it is something that you may one day be forced to grapple with. As your Anchor, it is my duty to try and ready you for such a thing."

Akira tried to comprehend the logic and failed. "So you didn't tell us to keep us isolated? To prepare us for a completely different type of isolation? How is that an explanation?"

Igor splayed his hands. "It is the only explanation I have."

Akira stared at him for a moment, fists clenched, before he turned on his heel and stormed out of the Velvet Room.

Lavenza looked up at Igor, eyes wide. "What was that?"

"Eternity, my dear young woman," Igor answered. "It is a terrible thing."

[Persona 3], [Persona 4], [Doki Doki Literature Club]
Mystery Food X / It's Cooking Time!
Author: Venku

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

The person who spoke normally would not seem out of place in the classroom setting. A rather small woman of average build, her schoolgirl uniform was of a dark black with the emblem over the right breast and knee-length skirt. In fact, the only thing which might seem out of the ordinary was her close-cropped blue hair.

She was no ordinary student, however. She was Fuuka Yamagishi, Support Staff for the S.E.E.S. Looper of the Amala branch.

And she was talking to three other Loopers.

"Of course!" one of the other Loopers spoke. This woman was of average height, only slightly taller than Fuuka. With closed cropped brown hair and wearing a bright green sweater over her uniform, Chie Satonaka was mixing ingredients into a large bowl. "We make this food all the time for the others, isn't that right, Yukiko?"

"Mmhm" the woman standing next to her confirmed. From the same area as Chie, Yukiko Amagi was garbed in her typical schoolgirl ensemble. A bright red top fitting well against her frame, as well as the black hose and schooling skirt. "You have to make the food with love, right Chie?"

"Right Yukiko!" Chie responded. The pot on the stove simmered and was making itself into a dark amber color as Chie was adding mocha coffee and instant coffee to the grounds. "What else goes into curry?"

"Oh I got it!" The last member of this quartet was of average height. Although she was more proportionate in build than the others, her schoolgirl fuku did it's best to hide the frame. Dark black blouse, ankle-length skirt, and a yellow bandana were Rise Kujikawa's preference when it came to clothing. Her auburn hair was pulled into a ponytail as she added. "Be sure you add the flour for the roux. And the seasonings! Gives it the spice of life!"

The seasonings, the roux, and the other flavors went into the bubbling pot on the stove. Enjoying the group camaraderie while this pot was cooking, none of the four Loopers were aware of the pending disaster.

…

Natsuki Awoke and sent out a Ping, as part and parcel of her standard response when awakening. While accessing her loop memories, and internally sighing when she realized it was a standard loop, she paused. Seven responses. "This should be interesting," the resident Tsundere of the Looping Literature Club replied.

Approaching the Club Room, which was the unofficial nexus for the Literature Club, she paused. There was a strange, offensive odor in the air. "Aw if the Tree is making a Ratsuki pun or a garbage pun I'mma just go read," she growled. Her speed picked up, intending to find and hopefully remove the source of the odor.

BOOM!

The reverberating shockwaves almost threw Natsuki off of her feet as the door to the club blew off its hinges. This caused the Doki to run inside. Already wondering if there was a violent Looper which would explain her multiple pings, she had already shifted into a fighting stance.

Instead of finding enemies she could pummel, all she could see was what looked like brown goop sprayed everywhere. The walls were coated with the sludge, the windows, and most telling of all were the four others standing there coated with the sludge.

"I thought you said you knew what you were doing?" the shortest of the girls wailed. Natsuki only noted that the woman's hair was blue. About the only thing she noted as she was just standing there, mouth agape at the carnage.

"Wait wait" the woman in the now muddy red top interrupted. "We're those who are adrif.."

"SAVE IT!" Natsuki barked as the four other women froze. "JUST SAVE IT. You...you destroyed the stove! What were you making?"

"...curry?" the auburn haired woman commented. "We...just thought it'd be a nice gesture."

Natsuki heard no more. Though she was quite annoyed with the scene before her, it took her a few moments before she could even respond.

Before she would continue, there was a small whisper as she asked a question. "Are you all loopy?" Natsuki asked, her voice calm.

Seeing the other four women nod, the resident tsundere spoke in a quiet whisper. "Alright. I really don't care what or how you do it but do try to clean up hm?" she replied before disappearing outside. "I need to gather myself, then we're going to have some lessons. I don't know what you thought you were doing, and I don't care what your plans were. When you destroyed my kitchen, you automatically signed up for my cooking lessons." And with that,

Natsuki left the room, leaving the other Amala branch members with wide eyes and stained clothes.

Some time had passed as Natsuki walked back in. The room was making progress as each of the others were doing their best to clean up. Their outfits having been cleaned, Rise and Fuuka were working on scrubbing the walls while Chie was working on the ceiling. Yukiko had her hair in a bun, and was busy scrubbing the floors clean.

Recognizing one of their uniforms, Natsuki paused. "Amala branch loopers?" Receiving a confirmation nod, Natsuki continued as she moved most of the tables to the side. "Already know of your Persona ability. Naoto and Kanji were already here before and let us know." A small shake of her head. "But they didn't say how bad you all were at cooking." Ignoring the looks of hurt feelings, Natsuki made four separate stations with a table and a portable burner on each. "Alright. We're going to have Fun now" she added, facing each of the others with a toothy grin.

Fuuka gulped nervously.

…

"Do we even know what's going on?" Sayori asked as she and Monika had Awakened elsewhere and had felt the shockwave.

"No clue. The code showed damage from the club room but that's it." Monika replied as she opened the door. After not moving, Sayori gently nudged her friend before looking over her shoulder, curious as to what's inside.

The club apparently had all the tables moved to the side and four cooking stations were installed. At each station was a pot and an assortment of fresh vegetables. Each station was manned with a cook who was stirring contents in a pot, their gaze focused upon what was going in it.

Walking between them was Natsuki. The pink haired one had a hat on her head and a chef's apron on, both feminine and both practical.

"Listen up!" she growled as she walked between each woman. "I don't care what you called that crap you were making when I came in here. Don't care if your idiots in baseline can eat it. When you're in *my* kitchen, you're going to cook something passable. We're going to do this and do this until it's right!" When a loud hissing sound was heard behind her, Natsuki turned her head to the offender. "Satonaka! What did I say about adding Mocha to your curry?"

One of the loopers, the woman with short brown hair let loose a yelp when Natsuki turned on her. "Uh...not to?" Chie Satonaka responded in a meek voice.

"Then why are you adding it?" Natsuki asked.

"Because I like.." the other woman began.

"WRONG! Honestly it's like talking to a brick wall here" Natsuki added in a bit of a huff. Sweeping her arm out to where there was a giant disposal pain, she added. "Dispose of the curry and start again!" She interrupted Chie's attempted rebuttal with a promise. "Empty the curry or spend this loop running around the school nonstop."

Wisely, Chie said nothing as she emptied her prior cooking project. Nodding her head, Natsuki went to one of the other pots, this one in front of Fuuka.

"Very good Fuuka" Natsuki responded with a calm tone. "See what I said about being mindful of the spices? It's like computer programming. You've got to be sure your source code isn't corrupted."

This comment caused the other woman, this Fuuka to beam. "Thanks Natsuki!"

Rise and Yukiko were collaborating on their collective cooking and heard what Natsuki mentioned. "But I thought that spices just added flavor?" Rise asked, a bit confused.

"Honestly and you call yourself an Idol" Natsuki replied in a bit of an irritated voice. "You tell me you go to rehearsal and just butcher the lyrics without memorizing it?"

The exchange continued with none of the room's occupants having noticed Monika or Sayori. "Let's come back later.." Monika commented to Sayori who nodded her head. "I'd hate to interrupt what might be a good start."

Quietly, as Yuri had not arrived yet, both ladies closed the door and turned around. "I'll spend some time with Yuri," Sayori replied as she went off in one direction. "Stay nearby in case Natsuki is wondering where everyone's at?" Monika nodded her head in agreement as Sayori disappeared.

"Well, this loop should be interesting at least. Hopefully it'll taste good" Monika commented as she went into her room.

[Persona 5]
Second Lap – Ryouji's Awakening
Author: Tetradrachm

"Looking cool, Joker!" Morgana paused for a second and then burst into a hysterical mix of laughter and mewling.

"Damn right I do," Akira said coolly. He regarded himself in Leblanc's bathroom mirror once more now that the makeup and disguise was finished. All white foundation, bright red eyebrows and lips, a blue domino mask, and to top it off a frizzy rainbow wig.

To keep from going totally insane, he and Morgana came up with weird tricks and ways of running through Baseline to keep it entertaining. This time, he was taking a cue from his DC Branch...counterpart wasn't the right word, but it wasn't completely wrong, either. Instead of Phantom Thieves, he was suiting himself up as the Clown Prince of Hearts both in and out of

the Metaverse when he could. The latter point definitely made things trickier, but that was part of the challenge.

Someone knocked energetically on the front door. Akira figured it was probably Sojiro; this Loop had only begun two days ago and the man didn't even trust him to go out at this time of night yet. Just to be sure, though, Morgana nodded at him and leapt off of the counter and out of the bathroom to check. Akira watched as he sniffed at the door.

"Uh...I think it's Ryuji," Morgana said uncertainly.

"Wha—Morgana!? Is that you?" Ryuji shouted through the door.

Akira and Morgana glanced at each other, shocked. Akira raced forward, forgetting himself for a moment in a surge of hope, and unlocked and yanked the door open.

"Woah, what the hell, man?" Ryuji exclaimed. He took a step back. "Who're—wait, Akira?"

It was then that Akira remembered what he looked like. "I—I can explain," he said, fully aware that he couldn't explain. "But wait, Ryuji, you remember me?"

Ryuji nodded eagerly. "Yeah, totally! But, but no one else remembers anything! Ann, the Prez—what's going on? Is this some kinda weird Metaverse shit?"

Morgana padded up beside them. "Trust me, it's way weirder than that."

"For real?"

Akira chuckled, but he almost felt like he could cry. "Let me change, and then we can go out to eat somewhere and talk about everything."

...

A few hours later, the group were full but busy at the usual ramen shop Akira sometimes worked at. Ryuji was visibly amazed at the explanations and goodies Akira and Morgana gave him—everything from unPocketed gadgets from their fellow Amala Loopers to five separate copies of Kamoshida's Treasure Akira had picked up in different Loops. He suspected Ryuji didn't totally understand everything they were saying about the multiverse, but it really didn't matter; Akira was just happy to finally explain it to him as an old friend, instead of a new one.

By now the conversation had shifted to slightly less serious matters. "So, everything fictional is real out there somewhere, huh?" Ryuji asked, picking up his third soda of the night. He popped the marble in and took a swig. "Does that mean the Phoenix Rangers are real out there, somewhere?"

"Sort of," Akira said. "They don't actually exist in the Hub on their own, or in other words they don't have their own Branch, but there's a whole Cluster of sentai Branches that are really similar to Phoenix Ranger. We haven't been to any of them yet, but Naoto told us they're a lot of fun."

"Oh, and the actual Phoenix Rangers can show up here too, in Variants," Morgana piped up from inside Akira's bag. "We might Wake Up one day and find ourselves the Phoenix Thieves, with transforming powers! Well, I already have transforming powers, but you know what I mean!"

"Wait, I thought Variants were when things just happened different? Like, I dunno...Kamoshida bein' a good guy, or somethin'?" He grimaced. "I can't even imagine that, though."

"Variants can be a lot of different things," Morgana explained. "Like reversed morality Variants, which is sort of like what you said but more intense, ooh! or Mini Me Variants, those are really strange..."

"Man, all this terminology is gettin' confusing," Ryuji groaned. "You guys are halfway to speaking a whole 'nother language! I feel like I'm back in English class."

"Come on, this isn't that complicated!" Morgana chided him. "We haven't even gotten into Pocket mechanics yet!"

Ryuji looked properly horrified.

"Don't worry," Akira said. "You're not supposed to get it all in one night. Understanding the Loops isn't some quick thing." He quirked a smile. "It takes a while to go crazy properly."

Ryuji narrowed his eyes. "Hey, yeah, that reminds me. What was actually up with the clown getup?"

Akira held eye contact, keeping his face entirely still. "It was because we live in a society."

"Huh?"

Morgana burst into giggling meows.

"Hey, wait," and Ryuji actually looked a little hurt, "are you makin' fun of me?"

"No, no, it's...a dumb Hub joke," Akira explained. "You know what? When we get back to Leblanc, we'll watch the movie I'm talking about, you'll get it."

"Heh. Thanks. I don't wanna be out of the loop—hey, get it? Loop? Eh..." Ryuji glanced to the side. "Gimme a sec. I gotta piss."

Akira only chuckled as Ryuji hurried to the bathroom. "He was chugging those sodas the whole time we've been here."

"Good old Ryuji..." Morgana agreed, then sighed.

"What's wrong?"

"Uh, nothing," Morgana said hastily. Akira didn't dignify that with an answer, so after a moment Morgana continued, "Well, I'm glad he's Looping, but..." A whine entered his voice.

"Why couldn't it have been Lady Ann instead?"

Akira, lightly, thumped Morgana on the back of the head.

[Persona]
The Edit – Monado Brane #1 – Troubling Portents
Author: Venku

Time itself was a funny thing.

Ever since Igor was visited by an avatar of Taira no Masakado, the anchor of the Amala Persona branch had discovered a few truths. Mankind always showed unlimited potential. There was always some malevolent entity which would come to cause problems, either due to the whims of man or from malice. Nobody knew what precisely the future held.

The fourth thing that Igor was having to admit: something, or someone, was doing it's absolute best to derail things.

Normally, the beginning of the branch would be a simple story. Takahashi Kandori, depending on the variant as Guy Shinjo, would on occasion be more aggressive in his attempts to use the DEVA system to take over his city. Mikage-cho would be encased in a bubble, and demons would be summoned which attacked everyone. Only by the intervention of Philemon and the 'Persona' game were people given a chance to fight back .

The bet between Philemon and Nyarlahotep was another matter, and something Igor didn't give much thought.

Those brave young men and women from St. Hermelin High School, led by that boy with an earring, rose up to the challenges admirably. Discovering and ending Kandori's manipulations, entering the DEVA system and dealing with the manifestation of despair from one of their own, were the typical events for this part of the branch. On occasion they would handle the rise of Nyx in the school and another would handle the DEVA situation. Such things would be the standard order of affairs.

Instead, someone was doing their absolute best to terminate the story.

If it was the Snow Queen variant, the final attempts to remove the remnants of the snow queen would meet with disaster. Either the Masked Girl or the Masked Boy would unleash a reality shaking spell which killed off the St. Hermelin crew, or the Snow Queen would speed up her possession of one of the teachers, heralding the end. In either event the loop would crash.

Should the Hermelin crew choose to pursue Kandori and the DEVA system, there would be other attempts to derail the situation. If the malevolent entity of one of the students did not go berserk and annihilate the party, the DEVA system would unexpectedly crash. Or Pandora, the ultimate expression of nihilism, would destroy all of Mikage-cho. Only by direct intervention, something against Igor's mandate, did the branch not crash.

Igor had spent time contemplating this situation, and in deep discussion with Philemon. While not looping himself, Philemon was aware of the loops and had adapted the mandate of the Velvet Room. While facilitating the guest's decisions and allowing them to make their own choices, the attendants, of which Igor was one, had the additional task of guaranteeing the loop did not crash.

Due to the discussion with Philemon, and personal interview of each of the St. Hermelin students who were looping, Igor had contemplated notifying Masakado of what was going on. The only thing stopping him was the fact that, for the moment, it appeared to be limited to one situation. Should more situations arise, he would be forced to act.

•••

After the end of the previous loop, Igor realized there was a major situation going on.

The St. Hermelin loopers had noticed that things were out of the ordinary. 'Demons' summoned by Maki's abandonment and nihilism were acting aggressive. Kandori had deliberately attempted to sabotage their steps along the way. Even the Night Queen was doing her best to advance the end of the world.

The survivors of the Alaya Shrine incident, as well as close friends, a relative and a few others, were the second set of guests he would have to shepherd. Normally, their journey would consist of confronting Nyarlahotep and the manipulation of rumors, either via the Masked Circle or the "Joker" rumor which forced a person to be infected with the Joker Virus. This Joker Virus turned the person into an avatar of a killer in the community and served as a dual purpose for making them feel 'guilt'. Said Guilt could be harvested to bring about the end of the world.

Depending on the variation, the derailment would be manifested in other ways. As per the last example recorded, the "Joker" phenomenon would not leave the victim, forcing them to succumb to a horrendous death. The other members would arrive to deal with the manifestation of the Crawling Chaos, who broke the treaty with Philemon and directly intervened. Instead of facing their true self, Nyarlahotep would instead slaughter the party and trigger the end of the world. This would also indicate that the loop would end prematurely.

Alone in the Velvet Room, Igor was in deep discussion with a blue butterfly, the manifestation of Philemon. "I am aware" the man replied as he was intensely focused. "That humanity's fate is in their own hands. We are to facilitate and allow our guests to reach their own conclusions. But with Time lost in itself, is not this abrupt end of the world an issue to address as well?"

The butterfly hummed and pulsated, speaking in it's own language, a language Igor could understand. "True enough. I am aware of our neighbors in other branches and how this timeline came to be" Igor added. "I wonder if a problem in their world would manifest here."

With another pulse, Igor closed his eyes and listened. "I cannot call him directly but there are intermediaries" he explained, taking a guess as to what Philemon spoke. Pulling out his tarot deck, Igor centered his mind and drew, letting the Arcana speak from within.

"The Tower. Curious indeed. Portents of a great calamity" he commented, as the first card was pulled. "And while under the effects of the inverted Emperor. Someone in authority who abuses their trust?" Concerned with the card pulled, the man closed his eyes and sighed, pulling out the final card. The inverted Judgement. "Most peculiar," he added.

Turning to address the butterfly as he nodded his head, Igor spoke. "I will be using one of the methods Masakado advised should I ever need him. This indicates a major concern." The butterfly hovered briefly before floating on.

[Persona 5]
On The Brain
Author: Tetradrachm

The cognitive world was a strange and unstable place, in more ways than one. The details of how exactly it worked, from the influence it had on real world minds and vice versa to the actual science behind it, were completely Loop Variable. Still, though, it was consistent enough that the long years Akira and his friends spent exploring the Metaverse gave them pretty good insight on how to use it to their own ends.

Even when those ends were...unusual.

"They seriously didn't care about you making so many copies?" Ryuji asked dubiously. He glanced at the back of the Morgana van, loaded full with crates of paper flyers.

"So long as you have the money, they don't care. Same as a lot of the other small businesses in town." Akira shrugged. He kept one hand on the steering wheel and only half noticed the various small Shadows he hit as they sped through the subway tunnel. Even though Mementos changed shape each time they entered, he'd long since memorized its regular patterns, and it wasn't like anything down here threatened them anymore. It was still a good source of experience and items, though.

"Like Takemi, or Iwai," Ryuji realized.

"Iwai definitely, yeah...Takemi would definitely care, though. She puts up a front, but she's considerate underneath."

"Oh, yeah, sure, she's real considerate when she knocks you out with untested drugs."

"I'm pretty sure the first few times she does it each Loop, it's just a bitter sleeping drug," Akira explained. He'd realized a lot of little things about his Confidants over the years, and it was sort of rewarding to get to explain them to other people. "I don't think she actually starts testing her real stuff until later on—"

"Ugh!" Morgana interrupted them, voice echoing through the van. "Ptooey! I just got a pixie wing stuck in my grill! Joker, pay more attention to where we're going!"

"That was on purpose, though," Joker smirked.

"Well, maybe don't do it on purpose then!"

"Okay, but wait—where are we going?" Ryuji asked. "I get the idea behind it, but where do we need to go to do it?"

Now Akira's smirk stretched into a full-blown grin. "Somewhere it'll make the most impact."

…

"What in the world...?"

"Is it a new movie?"

"These weren't here an hour ago, I'm telling you!"

"There aren't any words on them, though..."

The three Awake Phantom Thieves watched the growing crowd gather around Shinjuku Station from a safe vantage point—namely, beneath Akira's invisibility cloak. He hadn't actually met any of the Hogwarts Loopers yet, but Yu had given him a spare he'd picked up from Harry a while back.

"Woof, I'm beat," Ryuji muttered. "Puttin' up hundreds of flyers isn't the same kind of endurance test as a long run, y'know? It's more of an arm workout, for one thing."

Akira agreed with him whole-heartedly—his arms ached—but he had an image to uphold, so instead of saying so he just smiled confidently. "But it's paying off."
"Oh, definitely," Morgana agreed. "Millions of commuters come through Shinjuku Station every day, and as long as we keep putting them up for a week or so the idea will sink into the public consciousness for sure!"

Akira glanced over the closest cluster of posters again, each with an identical image of a massive buffet laid out in the middle of the station—

…

—and a few weeks later, with a few reapplications of the flyers, the Thieves found it waiting for them in Mementos' Shinjuku.

"This is almost better than a Treasure!" Morgana exclaimed. He practically leapt, oversized head first, into a massive platter of tuna.

"It sure beats the buffet at the Wilton, that's for sure." Ryuji had already half-laden his own plate with fresh okonomiyaki and taiyaki. "No snobbish adults around, and we picked out all the food here!"

"Mission accomplished, boys," Akira crowed.

"I dunno that I'd want to do it again, though," Ryuji admitted around a bite of fried fish. "It was a lotta time and effort, and couldn't we just buy all this food like normal people, with all

of our saved-up money?"

"For sure, but this way's funnier 'cause it's gonna leave Akechi scratching his head for weeks."

"Y'know, that's an excellent point."

[Persona 5]
Call Back – Ann's Awakening
Author: Venku

Being a biracial child in a foreign country is not an easy task. Ann Takamaki knew this first hand. While her skin color, blonde hair and model body would have her stand out in any crowd, she especially stood out in a land where ninety percent of the populace had variation of jet black hair. She knew this, however it still made things difficult in the long run.

As a result of being bullied and ostracized, Ann did not open up or make friends easy. Though her parents were quite wealthy, and she had access to whatever materialistic things she wanted, people as they were wont to do would spread rumors. This led to situations where she would be the brunt of the joke. Ostracized over things she had no control over.

Starting Shujin Academy, Ann was only able to make one friend. Even as Shiho Suzui told her that her paintings suck, they quickly bonded over being outcasts in a school set on tormenting them both. Both girls quickly found a kindred spirit in each other, and while others accused their relationship of being romantic, it was more than that. Anne found someone who treated her as a friend, and just liked her for her. Besides, one can love a friend without having it turn romantic, right?

Unfortunately, as people age, their bodies begin to change. Hormones, and the genetic lottery of their parents, begin to become apparent. While a trying time already, when your school is under the grips of someone who was an Olympian and his needs 'catered' to, life could and would be even harder.

Suguru Kamoshida, the volleyball coach of Shujin High, was one such person whom the spirit of hubris took root and flourished. A former professional athlete who was hired to coach the volleyball program, Kamoshida viewed the school as his own private grounds. Male students were brutalized at his hands while female students had "options" if he expressed interest.

Shiho was one such student whom Kamoshida focused his unnatural desires on. When Anne found out about this, she did everything within her power to try to deflect his attention. Fully aware that her reputation at the school suffered, she was more focused on protecting someone she cared about versus any damage to herself. However, even with noble intent, tragedy would sometimes strike.

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What would be the cause of the tragedy would be Kamoshida's predatory advances. His lustful gaze already on poor Shiho, he had managed to place Ann in a Hobson's Choice: either sleep with him, thus tarnishing her reputation even further, or he would continue to pursue Shiho. For a good while she kept him at bay until one day when she rebuffed him. Either by wounded pride or by nothing more than his base nature, Kamoshida turned his gaze back to Shiho.

The next day, burdened by guilt as well as what happened to her, Shiho tried to take matters into her own hands. By fate or fortune, her attempt failed, and she was escorted to the hospital. Before she left, she had managed to divulge enough information that Ann was able to piece together the culprit. Enraged, her new focus was on bringing Kamoshida down. He would pay!

She had managed, later on the school day, to overhear a fateful conversation. Her old friend Ryuji Sakamoto, as well as the new transfer Akira Kurusu, were discussing 'exposing' Kamoshida. Interested, as their goals aligned with hers, she attempted to find out more information, and wound up being harshly rebuffed by Ryuji. Not letting their words deter her, she vowed to shadow them to see what was going on.

It was due to the shadowing of Ryuji and Akira that Ann was first introduced to the Metaverse. Curious as to why they would disappear down a side alley, she picked up speed to keep them in her sights. This would have the side effect of allowing Ann to travel when Ryuji and Akira, or Joker and Skull, used their navigational app on their phones to open a path to Kamoshida's palace.

Upon discovery, and the shock of seeing the two men in their outfits, Ann would later admit to being confused by everything. When Ryuji shoved her out of the way and 'out of danger' as he put it, she stumbled back to the alley, allegedly safe from the Metaverse. What neither party knew was that the same app on Ryuji and Akira's phone had appeared on Ann's. Throwing caution to the wind, she had touched the app and 'entered' by repeating the same words that she had overheard.

The one thing she had not grasped was that Ryuji and Akira were prepared for this strange castle, while she was not. She would be later cornered by a contingent of men in knightly armor, and 'escorted' for her own safety. Though she was confused as to why they kept on referring to her as 'Princess'.

She would later find herself on a St. Andrew's Cross, being harshly interrogated by Kamoshida, who chose to dress in a crown, robes and too tight underwear. Next to him was the strangest thing, a copy of herself wearing cat ears and a revealing two piece. Kamoshida was confirming what her darkest fears were, that what happened to Shiho 'was' her fault. The shame, and the guilt, were crashing down on Ann.

The timely intervention of Ryuji and Akira broke through the fog of guilt and shame. While Kamoshida and his knights were promising to end them, Akira's choice words about just why she was following them had resonated within Ann. Rising, rebelling, and screaming in pain and rage, she had heard a voice promise to give her 'power' to avenge her friend if she would but take it. Ann's only response?

"Come, Carmen!"

The arrival of that promised power helped Ann to break free of her bonds. Her 'Proof of Rebellion', her Persona, allowed for her to subdue and eliminate the carbon copy as well as to support the others in defeating the knights present.

After obtaining the required information of what was happening from Ryuji, Akira and the cat Morgana respectively, Ann joined the others in their attempt to change Kamoshida's heart. Dealing with the monstrosity when confronted with his actions, the four of them were successful in 'stealing' the symbol of his arrogance. When faced with the option of killing Kamoshida as she had suffered the most out of those present, Ann instead opted to let him live. Though it was the right thing to do, her reason was not pure. She would much rather he live with the shame and embarrassment of what he did.

...

Recovering, enjoying the fruits of their labors, the now four friends enjoyed a hearty feast at the Wilton Hotel. There they had determined to continue with their crusade, to change the corrupted hearts and minds of the adults around them. With her past of being the social outcast, Ann was able to insist on a few things if they required or wished her help. Primarily: Targets must be unanimous, and regardless of the side effects, helping people would be their priority. They also chose a name for themselves: the Phantom Thieves of Hearts, or Phantom Thieves.

This would continue as their party grew. From Yusuke Kitagawa, the esoteric artist, to Makoto Nijima, the Student Council President who lived under an enormous shadow, Ann did her best to make the others feel welcome to the group, and continued as the 'voice of reason'. Later, with the addition of Futaba Sakura and Haru Okumura, Ann continued to be the 'Conscious' of the group as Makoto took up the reins as second in command and the voice of reason.

As in all groups, there would be ups and downs. The stopping of the 'Alibaba' hackers was met with the disaster of the CEO of Okumura Food's death. As the horrific fate claimed Kunikazu Okumura's life, the trust in the Phantom Thieves dwindled. This harsh public backlash as well as the gruesome fate of Haru's father forced each Thief to evaluate why they were participating in 'changing' the corrupt adult's hearts. For Ann it was simple. Strength for those who counted on her like Shiho, and for those whom she cared for, like Akira. Whether or not he felt the same way was his choice.

With each finding their own reason, the members resolved to see this through to the end. Even with the addition of Goro Akechi, who did not endear himself to the others, the Phantom Thieves did their best to change and steal the corrupted desires of shared targets. From Makoto's sister Sae Nijima, to the ringleader of the whole plot, Masayoshi Shido, the Phantom Thieves struck. As reality shifted and the False God Yaldabaoth attempted to impose his will on Tokyo, Ann was with her friends right unto the bitter end. She was one of those who stood in amazement as Akira summoned Sataniel, the ultimate personification of Rebellion, and cheered with the others as Yaldabaoth was defeated.
As with any major incident, there would be the 'aftereffects' to resolve. Akira, per the reformed Sae Nijima's summarization of facts, would have to return to jail so that the

surviving members of the conspiracy would not target her or her friends. While she wanted to punch him for being so self-sacrificing, she joined the other Phantom Thieves and others to get Akira's case overturned.

Happily, Akira's charges were dismissed and she was with the others to celebrate upon his release. And when Akira had to return, she joined the other surviving Phantom Thieves in an impromptu road trip.

Thus was the life of Ann Takamaki and how her life was changed. She went to bed one night, exhausted but happy with the changes which had happened.

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Funny thing about time being broken. Sometimes when you least expect it, you would discover that you get to relive what you'd rather not.

Instead of it being 2017, Ann woke back up in her parent's home. A quick glance of the phone showed that it was April, 2016.

"What in the world?" the young woman, Panther of the Phantom Thieves, muttered, as she looked at her phone. She scrolled through some things, like the photos and other memories she took during her time. Nothing was there. Not even the MetaNav app.

Concerned and wondering what was going on, the woman arose. As she got dressed one thing went through her mind. If things were as they appeared, she would stop Kamoshida and protect Shiho!

She raced out the door on her way to school, a plan already in motion.

...

Just as Ann thought, time had reset itself. Whatever God or Devil did this, she was offering silent thanks as she'd be able to right a few wrongs.

"Hi Ryuji!" she called out, having seen him run past her.

"Ann. Sorry can't talk running late!" Ryuji replied in a bit of a rush.

Sighing happily to herself as she continued, she paused to pick up a crepe from one of the local vendors. As she was doing this, a slick sports car drove up and the driver rolled down the window.

"Offer you a ride?" the voice, which made her spine stiffen, asked. She slowly turned around to see Kamoshida there, the same perverted leer on his face.

"Get lost, you creep!" she snapped as she continued walking. Doing her best to ignore his taunts and his leers, Ann continued with the rebuffing of Kamoshida's advances. Enraged, he shouted "You'll regret this" before rolling down the window and speeding off. This only seemed to steel Ann's resolve as she narrowed her eyes.

The one thing neither side noted during all of this? Akira Kurusu, with a cocked brow born of several decades of pattern recognition. With the odd exchange noted, he silently vowed to keep a sharp eye on the situation.

…

The urge to protect what one cares for is rather strong, especially armed with prior knowledge. While Ann was aware that Kamoshida needed to live to suffer, she wasn't going to let her friend get injured. Not on her watch.

Silently contemplating her next step while at lunch, she didn't notice the approach of Ryuji and Akira. Not until they sat right next to her.

"Ryuji! What..?" she asked in confusion.

Surprisingly it was the other boy who spoke. "I've..got a question" Akira replied as he pulled a can of Manta out of his bag and gave it to Ryuji. Ann declined a can herself while motioning for him to go on.

"Have you noted..strange situations going on?"

The melon bread dropped into its pan as Ann stared at Akira. "You mean you know what's going on?" she whispered in amazement.

"It's..complicated really. Tell me. What do you know of Norse Mythology, especially the World Tree…."

…

The conversation had to be spaced throughout the school day, and later resolved itself on top of the roof while sharing takeout. "You mean to tell me that our reality is a part of a cosmic computer program, and some jerk caused it to break?" Ann asked in confusion.

"Pretty much" Ryuji confirmed as he split a part of his burger with the cat which was in Akira's bag. After confirming that it was indeed Morgana, Ann cuddled the heck out of that cat, causing the cat to be flustered much to Akira's amusement.

"That's.." Ann was at a loss for words.

"Yeah that's messed up, right." Ryuji confirmed. "But..think about it like this. If we're awake and all that jazz we can stop some of the major problems."

"Like Shiho!" Ann gasped in understanding.

Akira nodded his head. "That's right. Sojiro, or Boss, the guy who runs Leblanc?" As Ann nodded her head in understanding, remembering Akira's temporary guardian, Akira spoke. "He's Awake this go round and agreed to take in Shiho for a few days. Futaba and Shiho are bonding over Featherman episodes."

Although her eyes shone with unshed tears, grateful that Shiho was safe, Ann paused for a moment. "Is..Futaba..?"

"Nah, not yet." Ryuji commented. He snapped his fingertips together before he turned to Akira and Morgana. "Hey! Let's go ahead and take care of Kamoshida!" he proposed. "And then Akira can show you tricks you need to learn, and have you meet one other person. Our Anchor." With the nonverbal agreement from Akira and Morgana, Ryuji turned his head to Ann. "Yo. You in?"

Ann smiled as she nodded her head. There was really one thing to say. "Ok."

Venku Wrote Everything and The Edit (segment.4)

Chapter Notes

Venku wrote everything in this chapter.

[Persona 4], [Five Nights At Freddie's]
Freddy's Family Expands 2: Dancing Fazbear Night!

Yu Narukami Awoke. Part and parcel ever since Igor informed him of the temporal flux, he sent out a Ping and received seven responses. Though he was surprised at the response, he was also a bit happy as well, as it indicated this would not be a Null Single Loop.

Accessing his memories, the leader of the Investigator Team, one of the many Wild Cards, he called Souta Seji, blinked. Having faced numerous gods in his baseline, tossed into a separate reality where he had to face manifestation of people's hidden truths, left him quite unflappable. Or so he thought.

His only response to accessing his memories?

"We're in Five Nights...weird."

…

As luck or fate would have it, Yu was met by Yosuke Hanamura and Rise Kujikawa. After confirming that each were looping by a separate passphrase, Yosuke was the first to raise his concerns.

"Yo! Partner. We're in Five Nights, man! Five Nights!" Yosuke replied, a bit of concern and fear in his voice. While wearing his typical headphones, Yu noted that Yosuke was also garbed in a bright orange shirt with the school jacket over it. Black sneakers and jeans helped to complete the ensemble.

"I don't get it" Rise commented. "Senpai" Rise addressed Yosuke. "What's so bad about here?" Yu had also noted that she was garbed in a short checkered skirt, black stockings with heels, a pink and white open blouse and pink ribbons. Seeing that Yu had noticed her outfit, she blew him a small kiss and gave a wink.

"Oh just your typical automations which will track you down and kill you!" Yosuke replied, the panic remaining in his voice.

"We..had to face our Shadow Selves which tried to kill us. So I'm..confused" Rise commented. "What's the concern here?"

"Oh. Right." Yosuke added as he let loose a nervous laugh before taking a few deep breaths. He turned his gaze to Yu. "Alright partner. So it's just us here. And judging by our outfits we're dancers. So what's the plan?"

As he spoke, Yu noted the outfit he had on. His standard attire would be the open school jacket he wore, with the untucked white shirt and pants. The only difference would be the yellow arm band. "Huh" Yu commented idly before shaking his head. Addressing the group before him, his voice adopted the 'Leader' tone.

"We're apparently here because the Tree is being cute. Also it appears that Five Nights is hiring for non automated entertainers. So with that being said…"

Yu struck an exaggerated pose and added. "Let's Dance!"

…

Arranging for the interview was no problem. Apparently the 'overnight' security guard was awake in the daylight hours and agreed to meet with Yu at the Pizzeria. With a minor discussion and confirmation that Mike was Awake, Yu made arrangements to return later in the evening with the others.

"So Mr. Narukami" Mike addressed Yu. "You all want to join our non-automation entertainment?"

"That's right! Together my friends and I will show you the power of Dance!" Yu stated with passion. "We will show you our true feelings!"

"Then let's see it!" Mike stated. He leaned back, eager to watch the show. The other automations were curious as well, as their gaze turned on the visiting Loopers.

As the show started, Rise spoke with a clear pure voice. "Come, Himiko!"

Rise's manifestation of her Will began to appear. As it did so, the woman with a cone shaped head began to shift and spread out. Melting into a ginormous stage and began to manifest itself.

Why is it becoming a big stage? Freddie wrote on his sign.

"Why is it about to destroy our building...?" Bonnie asked, noticing that the foundation was starting to crumble.

"Everyone out of the building!" Mike shouted.

…

"Just WHAT WERE YOU thinking summoning those things?!" Mike later shouted. The Loopers were all standing outside of the Pizzeria which was currently on fire.

"I don't know what happened" Yu replied. "This is the first time that.."

Chica screeched. Even if one could not understand them, the screen would indicate irritation and anger.

"Chica's right" Bonnie replied. Trying to smooth out their fur as baleful eyes turned to Yu. "I don't care what you summoned! You destroyed our pizzeria when that thing transformed into a huge frickin' stage!"

Rise opened her mouth but Freddie held up a sign. *It'll take more than Risette pictures to smooth this over!* said sign read. *But you could make one out to Freddie.*

As Rise dug into her Pocket for some pictures to sign, Yu turned to Mike. "So..uh. Do we have the job?"

Mike pinched his nose and let loose a loud exhale. "I'm not paid enough for this...no. No you don't have the job."

"You have five seconds to leave" Bonnie added.

Wisely, the Amala Loopers beat a hasty retreat. The only souvenier of this loop? A photo Freddie Fazbear pocketed of Rise with the inscription: To my biggest fan.

[Persona 4]
Stand By Me – Margaret's Awakening

There are two things that any resident of the Velvet Room will tell you. First is that the room will always take shape depending on the needs and the journey of the guest. It has been from an orchestra stage, to an elevator, a limo and even a jail cell. There were even times where the Velvet Room took on the shape of a movie theater or a multi tiered platform.

Regardless of the shape of the room, the second thing is that the Master of the Velvet Room is always in control. Oh, each resident knew about Philemon, the ultimate Master of the Room. And while his presence is always known, especially in the shape of a blue butterfly, the person most would associate as the Master is Igor. While his huge eyes and enormous hook shaped nose may be startling, people who have met him have always stated that he was calm and courteous. They also said he was cryptic as all get out but that's a different story.

Margaret, one such attendant, had awoken in a bit of a panic. She had remembered going to the Inaba region, where her last guest was with his friends and others. A physical manifestation from the Sea of Souls was manipulating events and people to gather Persona Fragments. Said fragments, formed when two Persona users clash, would allow the ability known as a Persona or Shadow to be suppressed. With the ego suppressed, this being known as Hinokagutsuchi, would be able to manifest in the world of man. Fortunately, while Margaret entered the battle along with her sister Elizabeth, each of the Velvet Room attendants were able to assist the groups present in stopping the manifestation of Hinokagutsuchi.

The group left to go about their lives. Elizabeth, her sister, continued on her journey to free the Great Seal, while Margaret and Theodore returned to the Velvet Room to continue their

duties. At the end of the day, Margaret felt immense satisfaction with just how well the former guests had performed. She closed her eyes, intending to rest until the next day.

...

When Margaret awoke, the first thing she did was stretch and check the time. Even though the Velvet Room was a separate space between the conscious and subconscious, each resident was keenly aware of the time. The year itself was supposed to be 2013, though Margaret was unsure of the month.

The internal clock inside of the Velvet Room reflected 2011. More importantly, the room had manifested itself back into the limo at the start of her guest's journey.

Naturally, this had confused Margaret. Was there an issue from the Sea of Souls? Another entity like Hinokatgutsuchi? What concerned her was that this was something else entirely, something with the ability to affect Time.

Though she wanted to scream and ask questions, Margaret was hit with another thought. Her guest was not like Elizabeth's guest.. This guest did not have that great of a fate, though he did have his own trials before him. Still maintaining within the rules that all attendants had to follow, Margaret was furiously working through her mind as to how she could help guide him past some rough patches ahead.

What she didn't know was that Igor was quietly watching her. When Margaret went to a deeper part of the Velvet Room for personal business, a blue butterfly floated past Igor and slowly thrummed. "Indeed" Igor commented as he slowly shuffled his Tarot deck and began to draw forth a reading. The Empress card was laid in the past in an upright position. For the present, the fool was overlain in a sideways position. Finally the Tower was laid in the future position as well, overlain in a sideways manner. "Her fate is like the others. Including Theodore and Elizabeth. Perhaps the Tree is acting. But I will keep an eye, as always".

Satisfied, the blue butterfly pulsed a few times before flying off. "One would think that being an Anchor would cause my master to not worry. However he is making sure that the wager would be ongoing, I assume" Igor mused.

...

As expected, her guest arrived. Slightly tall in appearance, his short grey hair framed his handsome features. Dressed in a student uniform, the shirt collar was 'popped' as the shirt was untucked. He stood there in a slightly aloof, yet friendly manner.

She wanted to say something as Igor spoke. To warn him of the fate which was to happen. Offering advice, guidance, or something tangible. Instead, all she would or could say is "My name is Margaret. I am here to accompany you through your journey."

Internally she cringed. This one great chance and she blew it!

What she did not see was that Igor gave a subtle hand signal to the guest, as Margaret 'disappeared'. When Margaret was out of earshot, Igor turned to Yu Narukami. He gently

tapped his watch to indicate he was awake, as Igor nodded.

"Is she starting to Loop?" Yu asked.

"Perhaps. I need to have confirmation. Whom else would be Awake?" Igor replied, his gaze on the younger man.

"Everyone else on the Investigation Team. Dojima, Nanako and Adachi" Yu replied. A slight pause. "Adachi has no wish to be here, so he's claiming to take some time off at Tatsumi Port Island. Out of Kirijo's people, only Kirijo, Junpei and Yukari are awake. Kirijo said she'd keep an eye on him, while Dojima and Nanako are globe trotting. Surprisingly.." he looked at the other man. "Her siblings touched base with Kirijo before departing. They're Looping as well. A recent development?" he asked.

"Indeed" Igor replied. "Margaret, if she is awake, would be happy to know this. I will send word. Let this Loop play out normally if you will..but.." he turned to Yu. "I pray, do not tip your hand. And if you could handle Izanami no Mikoto at your earliest..?"

"Consider it done," Yu added as he slowly left the room.

•••

Events were as before, as far as Margaret was concerned. With the rise of the "Midnight Channel" murders, the death of Mayumi Yamano and Saki Konishi played out as to be expected. This prompted the rise of the Investigation Team into the dungeons.

Margaret was always there, ready to assist with the Compendium. She even had given the guest, this Yu Narukami, occasional tasks to help out. Though she could have those Persona created herself, she wanted to see just how his 'soul' would respond to those requests. Though he gladly had those Persona manifest each time she asked, she was a bit curious at the ease with which he did so.

September, the herald of Fall. In a small town like Inaba, in the past it would be the beginning of the Fall Harvest. Traces of the past linger with the shifting of the colors, and the mark of the cool breeze.

Her guest had finished utilizing Igor's services. Instead of leaving to continue his task and his research, he turned his gaze to Igor before commenting. "We're done."

Confused, she was about to open her mouth when Igor replied. "Truly?"

A small nod of Yu's head was given before Igor turned his gaze to her.

"Margaret. I would beg your indulgence a moment" the Proprietor of the Velvet Room began to speak. "I wonder if you noted something. Have you ever had the strongest sense of deja vu?"

Margaret let loose a small gasp. "How.."

It was at this time Yu spoke. "Tell me" her guest commented. "What..do you know of Norse Mythology?"

…

"If I am to understand this correctly" Margaret had replied a few hours later. "Our universe is one of many branches on this Tree. Instead of it being a legitimate tree, it is a supercomputer which was damaged." she replied. The nice thing about the version of this Velvet Room? It had an open bar. She poured herself a drink as she sighed.

"And manifestations of power, literal Administrators.." she paused. "Some of which a copy resides in the Compendium, do their best to repair said branches. The only thing we..are responsible for is to not have these.." she turned to Igor. "Loops? Is that the correct word? Not have them terminate early?"

"Correct" Igor commented. "It is in rare conditions that a termination will be permitted. Such as to prevent further damage. However.." he shuddered. "Administrators rarely accept those and have creative ways to punish."

"And you're..always awake while.." she turned her gaze to Yu. "It will be questionable if you, my siblings or others are awake?" She had not missed that out of Theodore, Lavenza and Elizabeth, that two of the three were in the same situation she was.

"Correct" Yu replied. "A thing about it, and this may be a story for a later time, is that we do travel sometimes to other branches. Including.." he looked at her. "The same as some of the Manga near where you are."

Margaret let loose a small chuckle. Near her were copies of *Steel Ball Run* and *Diamond is Unbreakable.* "That..would be exquisite to see."

"While our guest would love to introduce you to the others.." Igor began. "Do you have any questions?"

"Plenty. But they can wait" Margaret replied. Yu took this as his cue to leave. "I'll check in later" he replied before vanishing out the door.

"Then. Margaret. As I told Elizabeth and Theodore.." Igor began before he cleared his throat.

"Welcome to the Looping Velvet Room, Margaret. You have the potential to be an amazing guest."

Margaret let loose a small smile as lyrics from an old song she heard on the radio played through her mind. It brought her comfort that her siblings would be with her on this, were they awake.

That song: *I won't be afraid. No I won't shed a tear. Just as long as you stand, stand by me.*

[Devil Survivor 2]
The Edit – Samsarana Brane #2 – Let's Survive

Responsibility was not anything new to Al Saiduq. As a Septentrione, he was responsible for enforcing the will of Polaris, up until the time he developed his own individual will and personality, eventually splitting from the Administrator. Even when Taira no Masakado informed him of his status as an Anchor, and of the World Tree, he took the main duty he was given seriously: do not crash the branch unless absolutely necessary.

There were times where he had to learn that lesson the hard way, but those are not relevant to this tale. Besides, when one lives forever, one is bound to make guesses to relieve the boredom and ennui.

Another part of the responsibility that Al Saiduq took upon himself was the proverbial health and wellness of his loopers. Though they would only number for now Yamato Hotsuin, Io Nitta, Daichi Shijima and Hibiki Kuze, the Shining One, they were akin to being like a family. While each member of the family had their ups and downs, in the end they knew they could count on each other.

And when the family is threatened, they band together.

After his conversation with Io concerning her ennui and anger, Al Saiduq quietly went to dispose of Polaris. While the choice for that loop rested on Hibiki's shoulders, and he was personally pleased that the Shining One chose to 'reset everything', Al Saiduq wished to express his concern over the growing problem with the administrator. The only building safe to do so was the Astrolabe, with its access to the Akashic Records. The message was left and the anchor prepared for the start of the next loop.

With no response when Al Saiduq awoke, the man thought nothing of it. Obtaining three other responses to his ping, the white haired man went to the top of the Shibuya 108 building. When he confirmed that the others were indeed Awake, he informed them of his request to meet at said building.

Sitting on the edge of the building, sipping on a strange concoction called Bubble Tea, Al Saiduq was in the process of what some had called 'People Watching'. Enjoying this pastime, he paused as he heard three sets of footprints approach.

"We received your message," Yamato Hotsuin replied. His voice a little gruff while addressing Saiduq, the man added. "What was it that Masakado told you?"

Saiduq rose, and turned to face the others. Yamato was dressed in his standard JPS duster and pants, a look of sheer boredom residing on his face. Hibiki had a half asleep look on his face as he wore his standard white hoodie, while Io was still dressed in her atypical school outfit. She spotted the Bubble Tea as she asked "What flavor?"

"Matcha" the man replied idly. He chuckled wryly at Io's exxagerated facial expression. "The bitterness is something to savor…"

Unfortunately, the meeting was interrupted with the arrival of angels. Specifically Dominion-class. The angels with dark blue hair, garbed in robes of what they dubbed righteousness, and holding both a scale and a book descended before the group. "O FALLEN SONS OF MAN"

the first Angel spoke. "YOUR SINS HAVE BEEN RECORDED AND THE MOST HIGH HAST CAST JUDGEMENT."

"INDEED" another of the angels spoke. "IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR MAN TO REPEAT PAST. ONLY" and here the words were blurred and edged out. "HAS THE RIGHT TO TRAVEL THROUGH THE PATHS OF TIME!"

"It is for that reason" a separate voice spoke as it descended from the clouds. This angel was garbed in purple robes, wielded a scythe and had a skull's visage with a cross branded on it. "That you who have been lost in time's embrace that the Throne has demanded your death. It pains me but when a Divine Mandate is given…"

"Who is this person?" Yamato spoke. His hackles were already raised with the interruption. Meanwhile Hibiki had moved to the side in a combat stance while Io went to cover the exit to below. Al Saiduq, meanwhile, began to glow in a corona of power.

"Be careful!" he called to the others. "This is Sariel. While he has the same dominion as other angels, this Herald dubbed the "Command of God" has dominion over death!" This spurred the others to adapt into fighting positions.

…

"Got it!" Hibiki spoke for the first time. Pulling out his Phone and activating his summoning app, twin demons formed behind him. Byakko, the White Tiger and the element of Autumn leaped out and roared in rage while Suzaku, the Fire Bird and season of summon let loose a screech of rage. They rushed forward, facing combat with the first Dominion.

Yamato had already summoned his two demons. Zaou-Gongen, Manifestation of Buddhas of the Past, Present and Future had already formed and was grappling with another Dominion. The angel used his scales as a club, and each strike was met with a blade from this demon. This Dominion had miscalculated a swing, and Zaou-Gongen struck it's unprotected abdomen. As the angel lay dying, a manifestation of light formed and struck, removing the other demon from the field.

As the Dominion and the manifestation fought, Yamato's other demon was locked in combat with the remaining angels. Neibros, Hell's Puppeteer, was flitting around the battlefield, throwing out random balls of concentrated darkness. Each time the darkness struck against an angel, it froze up and began to scream. After the scream, the angel moved to attack one of it's fellows.

As Hibiki and Yamato were in the process of removing the angels, Io decided to take matters into her own hands. Already having survived the channeling of Lugh, and her body crackling with his energy manifest, Io was lobbing her Almighty spell Aeradbhar at nearby Dominion enemies. In between battle Kikuri-Hime-no-Mikoto, or Princess Chrysanthemum, was floating between the battling loopers, healing any wounds with but a touch of her Chrysanthemum flower.

Seeing this continue, Sariel let loose a loud screech which forced the others to kneel and clutch their ears. "This ends now!" the Angel of Death spoke in a loud voice. Channeling

divine energy which was unleashed against the Loopers, Sariel spoke. "Thus saith the Lord God of Hosts: Ye who travel time's road shall surely die!"

Watching Yamato, Io, then Hibiki fell, Al Saiduq attempted to move to slay this demon. Lifting his hand to channel a blast of energy, he paused as his hand was frozen! What madness is this? Trying to raise his hand to strike, he paled as Sariel turned his gaze on the Anchor. "And for you which ordains this blasphemy, your punishment shall be eternal" as Sariel swung with his scythe. Though Sariel meant for the blow to be fatal, Al Saiduq in a last minute burst of energy, teleported away.

While this loop did not crash, the arrival of the Archangel Sariel threw events out of order. Watching as the cities fell to the Septentrione assault, Masakado had only one thought:

This is unusual. Masakado needs to be made aware of this.

...

When Al Saiduq awoke at the start of a new loop, he sent out a ping and received four responses in return. Not allowing for the same mistake in the last loop to happen again, he utilized his baseline abilities to travel to Io, Daichi, Yamato and Hibiki to see if they were the ones Awake.

"Al Saiduq" Yamato replied, his voice slightly irritated. The four others had already grouped together after confirming they were looping. "What happened in the last loop?" The vivid memory of that battle was fresh in their minds.

"I do not know," Al Saiduq responded. "This is concerning and something which I will need to let our administrator know."

"Please do so," Io almost begged. "That was beyond scary."

"Yeah" Daichi added. "I mean we can handle things normally but an Angelic Hit Squad?"

Hibiki nodded his head. "What do we need to do?"

"I will head to the Astrolabe to send that message." Al Saiduq promised. "You all are correct. Masakado needs to be made aware of that situation. Maybe this is a glitch in the system. Regardless I would feel safe if he was notified." He looked at each of the others in return. "Please. Stay strong, stay together and try to survive. When I have sent the message.." he turned to Hibiki. "Consider steering this loop to one where everyone works together. I will join you this go round."

Hibiki nodded his head while the other three murmured agreement.

"Well then.." Al Saiduq quipped. "Let's Survive!"

[Persona 5], [Doki Doki Literature Club]
Coffee and Curry

"Are you sure everything is going ok?" Sojiro asked. It was a lull between rushes and the man was checking in on his ward.

Ever since he was made aware of time stuck on repeat, there were certain traits which came out whenever Sojiro Sakura was 'Awake'. One of those traits was, as he always felt as the adopted parent of the group, looking after his daughter and her friends. He did not care that each of the kids which came into the shop were Phantom Thieves and dangerous in their own rights, nor that each were also aware of time being on repeat. They were still teenagers and in need of a strong parental figure, dammit!

"More or less." Akira replied as he was doing the dishes in the back of the coffee shop. It was a Saturday afternoon, and school was out for the day.

Out of those in this region, , only one of those was not responding as a looper. "I'm thinking we have a guest" Sojiro commented to Akira. "Would you mind telling me where everyone is?". With a small nod, Akira turned off the sink and faced the older gentleman.

"Haru stated she had a bad loop and needed to work off some issues." he began. Brewing a cup of coffee for both Sojiro and himself, he stopped the update to Sojiro until the Mocha Matari was finished. The cup was then offered to Sojiro, who nodded his approval. Enjoying the subtle spices and the blend of chocolate, Akira continued. "Her, Futaba, Ryuji and Morgana are handling any 'Palace' concerns up until the Big Bang Burger incident. Ann and Makoto are visiting Inaba and the group there with Shiho, and Yusuke is focusing more on his art this loop. Something about being the understudy of Hokusai a few loops ago. He had requested to be on standby this loop. We also made him promise not to lose track of time this loop and eat" Akira added, forestalling Sojiro's next question.

"Hoo boy" Sojiro responded as he heard the recap. "It sounds like you all had a hell of a time. It does amaze me that you can stay so strong. Also makes me proud." he added. Even with time on standby, Akira at heart was a young man who did not receive as many compliments from most figures in this town. A small nod of thanks was given.

The door opened, interrupting their brewing discussion. In walked a young woman, standing slightly smaller than Futaba with short pink hair. Wearing the Shujin uniform and carrying a backpack over her shoulder, she looked around the room and saw it was near empty. Nodding her head once, she hopped on the nearby barstool.

"Can we help you, Miss.." Sojiro started.

"Natsuki." the woman responded.

"Alright Miss Natsuki." Sojiro replied. A small wave of his hand. "Welcome to LeBlanc. We have curry and coffee."

She wrinkled her nose for a moment before replying. "I suppose that I should give it a go. Some curry and.." she looked at the lists on the wall, a bit lost.

Sojiro interrupted. "New customer to coffee?" he asked. Seeing Natsuki's 'soso' response, he nodded. "I see. Here." as Sojiro brewed a cup and slid it over. "Guatemalan SHB. It's a

medium cup with a rich citrus and chocolate taste."

Natsuki took a sip and nodded. "Not bad," she replied. "But..got any cream and sugar?"

Sojiro's left eye started twitching.

...

The twitching intensified with the amount of sugar and cream that Natsuki put into the cup before she nodded her head. Akira, watching this, decided to try something as he finished the fresh batch of curry on the stove. Honey was already added as the secret ingredient. When it came time for the spice, a pinch of cinnamon was thrown in with the other ingredients.

Pouring a ladle over a serving of rice, he slid it in front of Natsuki. "Try it," he encouraged. Ignoring the woman's glare, he watched as she took a bite. Then another. "Thish..ish..good!" Natsuki responded between mouthfuls as she devoured the plate.

"So what's this batch?" Sojiro asked. He saw her response to the food and he was a bit concerned for now.

"Some apples, honey, and cinnamon." Akira replied. He turned to Sojiro and nodded his head at the raised eyebrow. Like Sojiro, Akira had a few questions about their guest. Primarily, was she the proverbial "Guest" this loop.

While Akira walked to the door, to flip the sign to close, Sojiro cleared his throat. "Young Lady" the man replied as he leaned forward on the counter. "If I asked you about a World Tree, what would your response be?"

...

"So what gave it away?" Natsuki asked as she confirmed she was looping. Akira had also confirmed he was a Persona user when she asked. Surprised with the knowledge, she explained how her base branch had some Amala loopers visiting.

"Other than the fact we were missing a looper when we pinged, we didn't know," Sojiro responded. "However my baseline self had government intelligence training and you were holding yourself back in a reserved matter. I was going to ask about your age but I had a feeling it'd be a bad Idea" Sojiro responded, emphasizing the last word.

"Yeah, it would have," Natsuki confirmed. She ordered another cup of the coffee and added a lot of cream and sugar, thus rendering Sojiro temporarily mute. Seeing Sojiro's response, she paused. "There a problem?"

"He's a coffee connoisseur," Akira replied. Dishing out another plate of curry, he took over the discussion. "Another of our baseline Loopers, Ryuji, drinks the same way you do and he always chides Ryuji about being a kid."

"That's because that much sugar is bad for you" Sojiro grumbled.

"It's too bitter though!" Natsuki responded. This had Sojiro grumble and Akira bark out another laugh.

"That's why I added those seasonings to your curry," he replied. At Natsuki's quizzical look, Akira elaborated. "The honey? Cinnamon? Things to enhance a natural sweetness."

"Yeah. Better than.." she paused. "Are you familiar with others Persona Loopers like yourselves..?" With Akira's confirmation, she nodded. "Fuuka, Chie, Rise and Yukiko came in recently and.."

"That was you?" Akira asked, surprised. Natsuki looked at him for a moment in confusion, as he began to elaborate. "Our Anchor keeps tabs of the knowledge that we gain as Loopers. Those of us with the ability to summon multiple Persona need to always 'expand' and meet new people. And he encourages others who can summon one to learn new skills to keep their Persona strong."

"So when they met with the Anchor.." Natsuki began.

"Right. Just as he's aware of another who had problems here" Akira paused. "Her name was Sayori, right?" With Natsuki's nod, he continued. "He's aware of how Sayori felt about Kirijo's group, and he did get Naoto's later message. He was also aware that you had helped the girls learn how to cook. So expect the Inaba crew if you ever go there to.."

"..shower me with affection. Got it. Well at least they'll know how awesome I am!" Natsuki struck a mock pose, which got a chuckle out of Akira. Natsuki continued. "I had a question about what's going on."

"Sorry to cut this short," Sojiro interrupted. He had disappeared to take a phone call and had just returned.

"Everything ok?" Akira asked.

"That was Futaba" Sojiro responded. "Apparently Haru sprained her ankle working on that project so they're calling it an early night. She's heading back to the house with Morgana, and both are pushing for sushi tonight." Sojiro snorted. "Got to open up soon. You need to clean the dishes and see Takemi in case Haru needs medical attention."

"I'm sorry to ask as this may be awkward" Natsuki interrupted. "But are you his son?"

"Baseline had me on probation in Tokyo for a year" Akira elaborated as he cleaned up her plate and cup, as well as the cooking pot. "Sojiro was my guardian. Didn't like me at first but I warmed up to him. That and.."

"He saved Futaba. Though not by biological daughter, she and I are like a family." Sojiro finished. He nodded his head to Akira. "Due to his baseline past he needed a person to act as a guardian here as well. He grew on me, so we act as if we're family. Sometimes the baseline has Futaba and him as a couple and then they really enjoy playing tricks on me" Sojiro clarified in a rueful manner.

Natsuki nodded. Hiding a smirk as she took a sip of her coffee, she asked "Are you seeing anyone?" of Akira.

"No"

"Interesting." Though she didn't take stock of Monika's romantic life like Sayori, she also wasn't blind. While she thought Akira's hair was a bit too unruly, she couldn't deny he had a sense of charm about him.

"Anyway, we're about to open up" Sojiro responded. "Any conversations about what you kids do needs to be kept clean."

"Got it" Akira responded. He slid a sheet of paper to Natsuki with his phone on top. "Boss's likely to ask later but, if you don't have a spot to go he knows some people. And if you have more questions about Persona, or meet the others."

"I'm set for this loop, thanks. However," Natsuki palmed the number. "I'll text you later, alright? I do have some questions, though if possible I'd rather not be fighting this loop."

Akira nodded.

Natsuki smirked. This would be an interesting loop.

[Persona 3], [Doki Doki Literature Club]
Overdue Meeting

Sayori Awoke. Ever since time was stuck in infinity mode, there were a few things that she did. Check her Pocket for her notes. See if there were any Ping responses. And finally, access her loop memories.

She paused. Surely this could not be right. *Surely* the Tree would not place her back here.

Standing in front of the mirror of the girl's bathroom, she looked at her uniform. The small symbol on her breast indicated she was at Gekkoukhan High. If she was there then she was in one of the few places she'd rather not be.

The sounds which came from her lips upon discovering she was in the Amala Branch were the sounds of an angry kitten who just had a bath.

...

Settling down, although furious about the joke being played on her, Sayori went about the loop. In this loop, she was one of the recent transfer students who had won a scholarship for the full year. Housed in one of the nearby dorms, her life for this loop consisted of school, Volleyball Team, and Fashion Club. Though curious why those were selected, Sayori figured she would be able to make use of the Fashion Club to work on some of her cosplay ideas.

Navigating a hallway, Sayori was intercepted by a call of "Excuse me!"

She paused and turned her head to the sound of the voice. A small internal sigh was made as she recognized the speaker, a Mitsuru Kirijo. Her red hair standing out against her smooth skin, and her body something that a model would enjoy. Though Sayori's eyes narrowed some. Did Kirijo seem nervous with her here?"

"Yes, Senpai?" the visiting Doki asked.

"Would you come with me to the Student Council room?" Mitsuru asked. She wanted to place her hand on the younger woman but had a feeling it'd not be smart.

Sayori paused as she asked. "Is this something to do with the time issue on my schedule?"

Mitsuru nodded, pleased that Sayori did signal she was looping. "Yes! I must apologize but you've been booked for too many classes. There'll be a chance to go over your schedule there." Not the best answer, but in the open hallways she was trying to avoid undue stares.

Sayori nodded her head and followed the other woman.

...

Arriving inside the Student Council room, Mitsuru turned to face the other woman. "I'll start first by saying the Anchor had received your message" she added. "Though since you're here I had thought to clear the air" she added. Mitsuru recalled the last time that Sayori was here. Most of the Tatsumi Port Island loopers made it their mission to avoid the peach haired Doki if they ever ran across her in that loop.

Sayori cocked her eyebrow. "What's there to discuss?" she asked. After motioning to the chair and receiving a small nod from the other woman, Sayori turned her gaze on the redhead. "When I first looped here, your ability to summon your Persona involved using a modified gun to simulate suicide. Considering one of my close friends in baseline manipulated me into hanging myself, it was a sore point" she added. A slight pause. "I might have overreacted but I will not apologize."

Sayori looked at the other woman in curiosity. "What is there to dsicuss?" she asked a she took her seat. "I am aware that your Evokers were used to summon your abilities. Modified from actual guns. Mind you, I had a close friend who manipulated me in my baseline to commit suicide. Those references are a sore point" she added, idly touching her fingers together.

"Understandable" Mitsuru replied as she brought a tea pot closer. "Want a cup? It's not as good as Iroh's but it is quite refreshing."

Sayori gave a brief smile. "Thank you" as she fixed her cup of tea. Taking a sip, Sayori nodded. "Impressive. Might I get a bag later for my pocket?"

"Of course" Mitsusu responded. She took a sip then asked. "You're familiar with other Persona users?"

"Naoto, Fuuka, Chie, Kanji, and Yukiko all looped into our club" Sayori commented as she took a sip. "Naoto elaborated that you utilized your evokers to invoke death's embrace while there's another group in Tokyo who rip off their mask to show signs of rebellion" she added. Looking at Mitsuru for a moment longer as she added. "I do not object to what you can do. In fact I might like to have a discussion with your group or another with a concern I have. I do strongly object to the methods used, for reasons stated."

"I see" Mitsuru replied as she closed her own eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. "Though our Wild Card is the Field Leader, I do lead the S.E.E.S. squad and the Shadow Operatives overall. We did not take into account how our abilities might look to an outsider. I do apologize for any offense caused."

Sayori paused for a moment longer before slowly nodding her head. "I've forgiven the person who manipulated me into what I did in my branch. While I'll never *like"* and here she put emphasis on the word "the way you utilize your ability, I cannot and will not fault you for having it. Apology accepted. Was that the purpose of this visit?"

"One of them" Mitsuru explained. "It's something the other Wild Cards from this group, the Inaba group and the Tokyo group had mentioned that I'd like to try with you." Seeing Sayori's expression, she elaborated. "They each said that sometimes just sharing common stories or anecdotes might help bridge the gap. I'd love later to discuss some literature with you but for now I'd like to share some stories from our baseline."

Sayori blinked for a moment and nodded her head. "I'm interested. In both the literature discussion and the story." She leaned back, listening to the other woman talk.

•••

"So let me get this straight. Your baseline has your MC" Sayori had used the term to describe Minato "in essence *flirt* with every female he runs across?"

Mitsuru nodded her head as she took a sip of tea. "Yes. Oddly enough we get rather jealous when we catch wind of him with someone else. He also was invited into each of our dorm rooms."

The Doki shuddered. "Please tell me he didn't try this when Awake. Or that it's a common trait among the 'wild cards'?"

"Takeba, one of our Loopers, decided to teach Minato a strong lesson" the redhead replied. A small lazy grin as she pulled out some photos from her pocket and placed them in front of Sayori. "And the Inaba team, per Shirogane and Kujikawa...Naoto and Rise" Mitsuru elaborated with Sayori's confused expression. "Confirmed that in their baseline, if Narukami cheated, they had their suspicions, while the Tokyo people" and here she cleared their throat. "Injured Kurusu in his guardian's shop. Said guardian did nothing as his daughter was one of those that confronted him."

"I assume that Looping Wildcards learned not to do that?" Sayori asked. When Mitsuru nodded her head, she smiled. "Good."

...

"Did I ever tell you about the hot springs incidents?" Mitsuru asked. She disappeared for a few moments to handle a phone call. "And my apologies on the call. Shirogane and Akihiko are part of the Shadow Operatives and awake this go-round. Had to coordinate plans for this Loop."

Sayori nodded her head. "Understandable. And what hot springs incident?"

Mitsuru chuckled. "Our baseline has a class trip to a local inn with a hot spring. Naturally, it's a major attractant. Segregated of course. Men have their own time, women another."

Taking another sip of tea, Sayori asked "Did someone sneak in when they shouldn't have?"

Mitsuru nodded. "I think the boys just didn't realize they overstayed their welcome. And they tried to sneak out. Mind you, with someone who acts as mission support, another who is an android, a sharp archer, and myself it would be difficult. Sometimes they succeed." She then had a predatory smile on her face. "And sometimes they don't."

Intrigued, Sayori leaned forward. "I see" she replied as she took a sip. "What happened when they don't suceed"

"Execution. Normally I'd just stab my rapier through an icicle but as I wish no harm to them, just a lasting lesson, I have them encased in blocks of ice" Mitsuru elaborated. A slight tap on the table. "It lasts sometimes from six to twelve hours. To make sure the point stuck, even though I did not stab them, I still called it an execution."

Sayori giggled as she nodded. "Those meanies" she muttered.

Mitsuru leaned over and grabbed a sheet of paper. Writing two phone numbers on it, she gave it to Sayori. "One's Shirogane's phone number. The other is Haru Okumura's phone number from the Tokyo group. Both are awake and each have their own version of hot spring stories if you're interested."

"Might be more one of my friend's interest. But I'll definitely give them a call. Thank you" Sayori added as she pocketed the number.

...

Time had passed. The simple art of sharing experiences can, if both parties are receptive, share experiences, and allow insight into the psyche of the other. Mitsuru and Sayori shared experiences from their baseline as well as various loops.

The tea had started to taste the same, so Sayori cleared her throat. "I think we have shared relatively enough experiences, right?" she asked. A small sigh as she leaned back for a moment. "I've got my own questions though it seems like I might need to talk to the Inaba crew on something." Making a mental note to look precisely where Inaba was to Port Island, she continued.

"We got off on the wrong foot. I'd like it if we could spend some time later this loop. Just to get to know each other?" Seeing the shocked reaction on Mitsuru's face, she continued. "I'm not going to lie. How this is set up really does suck. Blaming you for this is just silly though. Friends?" she asked as she held out her hand.

A genuine smile spread across Mitsuru's face as she shook the other woman's hand. "Friends."

Sayori grinned. "Yay! Oh I still want to discuss some literature with you later. And.." whatever else Sayori was going to say was stopped with the chiming of the bell. An 'Eep!' came from the Doki's mouth as she grabbed her stuff ran out the door. "Gottagotalktoyoulater!"

Mitsuru chuckled, pleased with the outcome.

[SMT I]
The Edit – Genesis Brane #3 – Appreciation

An ancient proverb once said that "Mastering others is strength, Mastering yourself is true power." Ever since time began to play on repeat, Steven found wisdom in that statement. After all, one of the purposes of the Loops was to improve yourself.

Mind you, the person who spoke that was someone he interacted with every time the Loop reset. Taishang Laojun, otherwise known as Laozi, would always interject himself in the battle between the forces of YHVH, under the Messian church, and Lucifer, under the Cult of Gaea. As benefiting his beliefs, he would always try to offer a moderating influence between both extremes. Sometimes Futsuo would accept Taishang's guidance. Other times he would go his own way and follow the polarizing beliefs of the Gaeans or Messian church.

Regardless of Futsuo's beliefs or choices for the loop, the man would always spend time with Steven before the Great Cataclysm. This Cataclysm was one of two pivotal events. Heralded by the forces of YVHV under the American Ambassador Thor, it would jump-start the apocalypse and send Futsuo and his friends to the Diamond Realm for their safety.

"You seem like you're contemplating something," Steven remarked as the young man approached.

"Have you heard from Masakado?" Futsuo asked.

"I have," Steven remarked. When he Awoke, there was a note in his pocket from Ganesha. Writing on behalf of Masakado, Ganesha had informed the Anchor that there was a problem with the base Amala code. Besides Ganesha and Masakado, a few of the other Administrators were assisting in repairs and debugging.

Ganesha had also warned Steven that something was attempting to influence the outcome of the situation. Ganesha, via the note, had also asked Steven to report any extreme loop variations.

Explaining that to Futsuo did not have the desired effect on the man. Instead, Futsuo's face remained in a sour expression.

"What is it?" Steven asked.

"It's the same argument, I suppose," Futsuo responded. "I understand that having the chance to learn and to repeat time can be a blessing and a curse. However, this all seems tedious and pointless."

"Waruo and Yoshio" Futsuo began, referencing his two friends who would later become the champions of the Gaean Cul and Messian Church. "Still have not learned that they are cosmic pawns. I have to wind up seeing their death every loop, sometimes at my hand." Futsuo uttered a deep sigh, muttering under his breath that it wasn't the main problem.

Steven paused. "Then what has you in this state?"

"I'm not blind, you know." the other man responded. "I'm aware that we're in effect reliving the Genesis myth every loop, near the end." He gave the man a contemplative look. "If Ganesha and the others are trying to find out what's wrong with the branch, can they figure out why I don't have an Eve to share the loops with?"

Steven looked at the younger man in askance. "You have a valid concern" he began. "But you're not seeing one thing."

"What is it?"

"Appreciate what you have instead of mourning what you do not have," Steven responded. He began to count off what he viewed as the positives. "With time repeating, you know what's coming. With the conflicts itself, you know how best to prepare. You also have learned empathy. To not see your friends as just mere pawns, but as valuable individuals."

"Very few people can claim that," Steven remarked. He looked at the other man for a moment longer. "It is rough, Futuso. And dangerous, with someone trying to interfere. However, you cannot give up one thing. Hope. What is it the old man always told you?" he asked.

"That we are a part of this life, and yet connected to everything else around us," Futsuo responded. A small nod. "I get it, Steven. I just get so frustrated."

"I understand, my young friend. I am always here to listen" the Anchor responded.

Futsuo gave a small smile as he walked onward. Picking up his phone, Steven heard the faint words as the other man left his line of sight: "Hey. Yeah. Waruo, I think I'll take you and Yoshio's offer to crash at my house tonight..."

Steven smiled. The battle ahead, as he was concerned about what caused the deviations, would be fierce. What made him more content was this victory Futsuo had within himself.

"Keep Mastering yourself my young friend" the Anchor murmured.

[Persona]
The Edit – Monado Brane – Call to Action

Igor's primary responsibility as a resident of the Velvet Room was to facilitate a guest's journey. That had been his task ever since Philemon had given him this instruction. Others were in the Velvet Room to assist him in this manner. Each assistant was under the same aegis as him: to never outright interfere in the guest's path.

Since becoming aware of time's repeat, he had found that his responsibilities had not changed overmuch. His primary focus was to shepherd his guest through their path. If a guest were to 'awaken' to time's flow, he was to teach them everything required, as well as assisting guests from other branches. Rarely was his participation required. Those times, as he would tell Philemon later, were heralded with apocalyptic news.

The note in his pocket was a perfect example.

Written by Lord Ganesha, a fellow administrator, the note was simple yet profoundly eloquent. Igor's home branch was called Amala by the Administrators. His domain was an offshoot of that branch. The main branch of Amala itself was under attack by a malicious code, and Igor, per the note, was informed to report if there were any unique variables.

He closed his eyes and cleared his mind. The Tarot, guide to the hidden universe, was in front of him while his primary hand rested on the deck. Three cards were pulled from the deck, as Igor sought only a past-present-future read.

To begin this read, Igor pulled three cards then opened his eyes. The past was the upright Fool itself, indicating unlimited and untapped potential. Present was a reverse Emperor, giving rise to an authoritative figure imposing their will. Confirming the less than positive future was the inverse Tower, signaling destruction without a chance for rebirth.

Concerned, he left word with the attendants to reach out to the loopers who were Awake. He went to his private quarters to commune with Philemon. While Philemon was not one of those Awake, he was Loop Aware. This information was something that Igor felt Philemon should know.

...

Of those who were Awake, three were ready to meet with Igor. Naoya Todou, otherwise known as the boy with the earring, was from the group which handled the S.E.B.E.C machine crisis. Tatsuya Suou was from the group which was responsible for the N.W.O. and rumors affecting reality, while Mitsuru Kirijo was from the group which handled the arrival of Nyx.

Each met Igor in the Velvet Room, which had adapted the shape into a mobile military command center.

"This is new, Igor" Nayoa remarked. Tatsuya was in conversation with Belladonna while Mitsuru was monitoring the situation.

"I've asked for your presence," Igor began "Due to a growing crisis."

"Crisis?" Mitsuru asked. Her attention turned to Igor while Tatsuya finally noticed the discussion.

"Who all can explain the difference between our branch and the main branch?" Igor began, asking those present. Tatsuya was the first to respond.

"The deviation happened during what some called the 'Tokyo incident,'" the man explained. "During that time, instead of the ICBM missiles launched by Ambassador Thorman, both Thorman and Gotou were placed under arrest. A benefit of this was that their attempted coup was discovered and subsequently quashed."

Mitsuo Kirijo picked up the explanation. "There was an incident concerning Karokuza High. While there was one survivor, a Tamaki Uchida" and here she nodded her head to Tatsuya, who was familiar with the story, "what exactly happened has been kept under wraps."

Igor nodded. "Very good," he replied as he slowly spread the cards from the earlier read on the table. "The future is always changing. Those with the power of Persona, especially the Wild Cards, are proof of such."

"I have been informed by the branch administrator that there is an attack on the main branch." This caused a reaction from those present, even stopping the blind singer Belladonna's aria.

"Sounds bad" Nayoa replied in a laconic manner. Meanwhile, Mitsuru was looking over the cards herself. While she preferred to face problems with a clear and logical understanding, there were times where a supernatural answer was the only answer. To be prepared, she brushed up on occult and esoteric material when Awake.

"Is this why you called us?" Mitsuru asked as she tapped the reading.

"Yes," Igor responded. "While they are not certain that our part would be affected, an attack on the main branch would affect all of us."

"Why?" Tatsuya asked.

"Domino effect" Nayoa replied. "If a domino falls and crumbles, it knocks down surrounding dominoes. Ever built a house of cards?"

"Oh."

"So you notified us," Mitsuru responded. "What do you want us to do?"

"Speak to your people. See who would be willing to assist should our help be required."

Each nodded their head as they disappeared.

...

Igor received a response later in the loop. He was not surprised by what was said. He wrote the information out on a piece of paper.

"To Administrators

From: Persona Branch

We offer our help concerning the problems affecting the main branch.

Signed: Loopers of S.E.E.S., Seven Sisters High School, and St. Hermelin High"

[SMT I]
The Edit – Genesis Brane #4 – Never Fade Away (Aoi's Awakening)

Imagine, if you will, that the various stories you heard through your childhood about angels serving divine beings were real. These stories also mention fairies frolicking in the woods and mythical beasts roaming sight unseen. Men and women, who exhibited proper virtues, were rewarded.

Spoken in whispers was the other side of that coin. These stories tell of hideous demons who thrived on human suffering. These tales mention malignant spirits who despised the living and sought to inflict horror and death. These spirits served as a warning to impressionable young boys and girls. Each lesson was the same: Do your chores, Honor your parents, Listen to the priests. Or you will be trapped eternally as a horrid youkai, forever denied salvation.

As adults, the belief in the stories faded over time. Rational thought replaced religious superstition.

What if those stories were real? That the stories of Michael defeating Lucifer, of Amaterasu hiding due to Susanoo's cruel pranks, and of Thor slaying Jormungander were real? Would you still believe?

Would you believe even if the motive was not as pure as the stories state?

…

As expected of one living in a metropolitan city like Tokyo, the young woman who sometimes went by the name of Aoi was exposed to various faiths. Missionaries, Shamans, and Mikos spoke to the young woman and expressed that their way was considered the one way.

Strong in her beliefs and convictions, Aoi harbored a personal take on everything. A major catastrophe was brewing. While she would be responsible for leading a resistance, her ultimate fate would be with another. She spent her formative years training in the mystical arts as well as martial discipline.

When Stephen, a famed scientist, opened a gateway to the Expanse, Aoi paid attention. It was newsworthy at the time. A man as famous as him being permanently crippled. The scandal involved seemed momentous, to say the least. Even more so as he was researching a 'Terminal' system.

As Stephen created the Demon Summoning Program to speak with creatures from myth, she was one of many who downloaded the program onto a portable arm terminal.

The arrival of these creatures prompted the American Military to attempt to enforce Martial Law. This move, done by Ambassador Thorman, had a hidden purpose. Primarily it was to give cause to launch ICBM missiles to nuke Japan and bring about the fabled Millennial Kingdom of God.

Thorman's attempt met with resistance from the Japanese Special Defense Force, or JSDF,, which staged a military coup. This coup, led by Gotou, was made with a dual purpose. Pushing back American aggression was the primary focus while preaching the Cult of Gaea's doctrine was another. This doctrine stated that the old gods, including Lucifer, were being abandoned. The worship of Lucifer would be enough to protect Japan from what was happening.

Aoi led a rebellion against Gotou and Thorman. She saw the extreme view of both sides and knew that whoever won, humanity would lose. While Thorman did not make any overt moves against her, Gotou would begin to apply pressure.

This pressure led her to the person who would change her life.

...

She never caught his name. Some would say he was called Kazuya. Others, Futsuo. Regardless of his name, she would remember how he entered her life.

A waking dream was what first gave her a vision of him. She was bound, fated to become a sacrifice to a demon lord when he burst into the room. Romantic of its nature, she first heard of his name and the feeling in her soul of destiny. She implored him to seek her out.

He did, in an underground mall. Any happiness at this meeting was cut short as Yuriko, working with Gotou, kidnapped her. Yurkio had set her up as the main sacrifice in an auto de fet. He burst in, with his friends, and rescued her.

Though her emotions welled, she managed to give her friends the information required for their journey. Joining him, she went to try to sway Gotou and Thorman from their purpose. Her plans did not work out, as both attempted to kill them. Concerning her was Thorman's words, which stated that as he died for God's Millennium Kingdom, Tokyo would be annihilated in 30 seconds. Channeling the last burst of magical energy, she sent Him and his friends to a spot where they would be safe.

As the Great Cataclysm destroyed the world, she perished. Her soul was reincarnated in the body of a young woman of the Church of Messiah. Remembering the religious doctrine taught, she also had memories of what she had learned. Of her longing to see him, her mysterious savior.

Fate would have her set up to be tortured. Ozawa, a local ruler of Shibuya, had placed the daemon Ariadne in her mind, to slowly torture her until she died. As before, He came to rescue her. To free her of her mental and spiritual torment.

She joined him on his journey. Where the world suffered another flood, and the Great Cathedral was the site of a bloody battle. Four Major Demons from the Cult of Gaea and the Four Archangels perished. A mysterious old man, the avatar of Taishang Laojung, met them at the top of the tower. He confirmed that the path walked was one that required balance between both extremes.

Happy and content, Aoi went to sleep. Her goal for the new day was to help Him usher in a new world.

…

She awoke with the blurring of the alarm. Smacking it awake, she went to the window. Looking outside, she did not see a world ravaged by nuclear devastation. A glance at her desktop calendar showed that it wasn't even 203x.

Aoi murmured. "What in the world?" She was afraid a demon had did something in her sleep.

She stepped outside and began to walk crisply to the mall. Stopping at one of the large display monitors, she listened as Gotou went on his spiel concerning the coup.

"This is weird. But maybe.." she murmured, talking to herself. Plans began to form. Though her group was not openly violent, perhaps she could prepare for the ICBM destruction. Free the girls who shared her name. Cause some difficulties for both sides. The possibilities were endless.

What she didn't see was a young man standing a few feet behind her. With eyes that told a different tale than his youthful face, the young man who was called Futsuo this time was cautiously optimistic. Could it be after all this time someone 'else' would be able to join him?

Pausing briefly to find Stephen, Futsuo walked with a spring in his step.

…

At the mall, Aoi was energetic in her plans. "I don't care what I said yesterday. We need to send some people inside the JSDF Compound. Other girls with my name are there and they need to be freed!" she barked at one person.

To another: "Tighten up security. Two men to a post. Space them out!"

A soft cough let her know that she had guests. Turning to see Futsuo and his friends, a grin formed on her face. "Even better!" she exclaimed. "Welcome!" she added, addressing the newcomer.

Of course, he was not alone. He was with his friends, and she had committed their faces to memory. A harsher man with a sports jacket which seemed to always seek power at a cost. Another man who had an almost androgynous face that belied a stronger conviction. She knew what they had done, and she had plans for the both of before she could say anything, Futsuo motioned her to the side, in private.

Her cheeks blushed for a moment before she asked him, "Is there something you need?"

"Have you noted anything weird?" he asked. "Of what appears to be a strong sense of deja vu...?"

...

She had sent his friends along on the assault against Ozawa and the JSDF while they talked. His story, had she not experienced what she did, would have sounded far fetched. Literal gods supervising their level of reality? Her reality suffering from a computer glitch?

The arrival of Stephen, who confirmed Futsuo's story, helped ease some of her concerns.

"So besides the Great Conflict which will happen regardless, we're having a bit of a situation?" she asked them both.

Stephen nodded. "Yes. The main force behind the Messian Church is not happy with what's going on and is causing problems. The Administrator.."

"Taira no Masakado" Aoi interrupted. While she was leery of gods in general, the legendary folk hero overseeing this branch did calm some of her nerves.

"Yes. He's obtaining assistance from others to try to isolate the glitch. While we're stuck on this repeat path, odd variants would pop up" Stephen confirmed. Futsuo had explained on some cases where Ambassador Thorman would launch the nukes early. Of other cases where the flood would stop people from even reaching the Cathedral.

"I see. And I'm.." she asked, wanting to confirm why she was being told this.

"You're here to help our young friend. Nothing more. Nothing less. Anything else happens, as long as the branch itself is not damaged.." and here Stephen rose from his chair, channeling forth a glowing ball of Magnetite energy. "I do not care."

Behind him, a rogue Orochi was sneaking up on the trio. Aoi was rightfully nervous, while Futsuo pulled from a hidden satchel a modified pistol. Stephen, however, threw the ball of Magnetite energy behind him. The Orochi screamed in pain as it started to compress on itself, before disappearing with a loud squelching sound.

Stephen sat down. "I'm not without sufficient skill. Nor is our young friend here. We do have some lessons for you to learn overall, but this is about your growth. And stopping issues with this branch."

Aoi smiled. Regardless of what would happen, this memory would not fade. She turned to Futsuo and gently caressed his cheek. "What do I need to learn?"

Miscellaneous 20 and The Edit (segment.5)

[Devil Survivor 1]
The Edit – Skheys Hmsim Brane
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

There was nothing more foreign than sleeping in his own bed. Nothing more uncomfortable than it. It was too hot and too soft, and the stale air indoors was choking him. He tried opening the window to let the cool night breeze come in, but then the harsh light from the cars, the street lights and the billboards would assault his eyes forcing them shut.

Atsuro was simply too used to sleeping outdoors.

The nights he had to sleep in his bed, he would instead spend them on his computer, doing different things every time.

Some nights he would spread rumours on the net that he heard something a crime ring, or some railway incident or whatever. Sometimes he would tell everyone online that the Shomonkai was in the area and that they should stay well away from them cause there was definitely something fishy about those guys. Sometimes he would spend hours on end trying to convince Haru that she should try having her shows in other areas of Tokyo, she would definitely draw a crowd there.

Once he tried urging people to open their microwaves and check for any "odd-looking hardware". That one did not go so well.

Some other nights he would Ping and wait for any answers. If he got them, he would spend all night texting them and sending emails.

Some nights he just felt so *tired.*

It wasn't even physical. Every new loop was practically a refresh for his body. All the strength, none of the scars. But he just felt so exhausted. Every single night was as if he stayed up chasing after the deadline of a project; a bone-deep weariness that left you robotic, barely managing to do the motions to carry out the task at hand.

Most of the time, the task was figuring out Abel.

Abel was so different each and every time; different name, different beliefs, different behaviour and methods, sometimes with a goal, sometimes without one. Him looping had brought a whole other level of craziness; due to the Bel demons all being pieces of Abel's soul, they were all looping, and Atsuro got the feeling that his friend was *experimenting.*

Solutions. People. Problems. Variants.

They never got to save Honda's son though.

Or stop the lockdown for that matter.

…

"I was thinking explosives."

"You *always* think explosives."

"Why, do you have a better idea?"

"Where would we even *find* the explosives?"

"Megidolaon is practically an explosive."

"Fine, but we're getting ice cream after this."

A few hours later, they went to an ice-cream parlor at the other side of the city and got ice-cream.

If they smelled of smoke and dirt too strongly, nobody commented on it.

…

At some point during the loops, Atsuro managed to struggle a gun out of the hands of those corrupt officers.

…

"So, what do you think we should do about the Shomonkai?"

"Why should we do anything about the Shomonkai?"

"If we don't, Amane will die!"

"Fine."

…

When his friends asked about it, he reasoned that they never knew what the loops could throw at them. It was partially true too.

Just partially.

…

This loop, Abel decided to take over the Shomonkai from the inside.

Halfway through the lockdown, he tossed the corpse of the Shomokai leader to the ground of the main shelter and declared himself in charge.

Atsuro and Yuzu only found out later what had happened.

A few hours before the lockdown, he forced Loki to reveal all he knew about the other Bels's locations.

He made a rope out of all the mistletoe charms he collected over the loops and tied them with actual mistletoe. He cornered Beldr before the demon even knew what was going on and tied him to a pole near the graveyard. The Devil's Fudge rope cut into the silver demon's skin and armor, and Abel just watched as it left behind ugly rushes, and eventually blood.

With Beldr out of the way, he went after Belial next. He waited until the demon had cornered Haru at the stadium before freezing him rock solid. Then he undid that ice, and instead he pinned the weakened demon down on a seat in the concert hall before carefully impaling him with new shards.

Then he used his other demons to carry them both to the headquarters of the Shomonkai, when right before their leader's eyes he crushed both their skulls and let them dissolve into dust, drawing their power in himself.

Jezebel came out on her own, after that.

Well. That was one way to save Amane.

…

There was this one time when he did have to use the gun – hold Commander Fushimi at gunpoint.

Damn. He was literally the most reasonable guy in this mess.

…

This loop, Atsuro decided that he'd rather try sleeping in a bed for once – never mind how unused he was to that – and therefore crushed at Naoya's place.

Turns out Loki was also hanging out there. Who knew.

Actually he knew, but playing clueless was kind of fun.

…

"Do you think we should get weapons too? I mean, we're pretty good at punching now…"

"And Kazuya's got those force things..."

"Yeah. Wait. Is it force or The Force?"

"…I have no idea."

…

In this loop, Kazuya – or rather, Abel – was already a cult leader. Atsuro was not entirely sure how that happened, but he found Naoya and Loki at Gin's bar getting drunk about it, so it probably wasn't part of their plans.

…

"Wait. YOU challenged LOKI into a *drinking* competition!?"

"Yep! It was fun!"

"Atsuro! We're fifteen!"

"C'mon, Yoo-hoo! We're like, centuries old! I think."

"Still, Loki is a known alcoholic! Haven't you heard Naoki?"

"All I've heard from Naoki lately was screaming."

That sobered them both up.

…

Even if he always had the gun in his Pocket, Atsuro felt like he could always feel it. It was heavy, and either too hot or too cold – no in-betweens.

He could almost feel the weight of each individual bullet. Was that just his imagination? Who knew.

…

Naoki's visit was… memorable for several reasons. The screaming being the least of it all.

His appearance was so sudden and the bodycount so high that the Laplace mail actually crashed. He may have caused a skyscraper to collapse.

His marking were glowing brighter than ever, and his eyes were a bloody red. His teeth were more like fangs and his voice was raw and horse, like he had dried from inside – like he had not stopped screaming for a second.

He was strong. But his mind had left him. His demons had left him.

And Abel was awake.

They could take him.

That was the second time Atsuro had to pull the gun.

…

Sometimes, it was easy to forget just how many people they got involved with over the course of the lockdown.

Honda and Kaido somehow *always* seemed to team up, which was weird as one was a gang leader and the other a plain old salary man.

But Honda also had a good degree of desperation in him, and Kaido was the one offering an immediate solution to his problems, so it made sense to some degree.

In some of the loops, Atsuro had attempted to keep Honda away from the lockdown, but…

That surgery never went well.

…

When he saw Mari with her blood completely drained just laying on the ground, his first thought was "oh".

He had completely forgotten about her.

…

"I wish Abel would just *stick to a schedule* for once…"

It was not often that Atsuro whined to Yuzu – usually, it was the other way around – but she took it in stride and nodded sagely.

"I *knoooooow*. He just keeps doing those weird experiments – remember the time he directed Kudlak against the soldiers at the station? How did he even manage to do that?"

He remembered that, alright. The demonic vampire had nearly gone through fifty men before he and Yuzu realized what was happening.

"Well, it didn't work. Mari and Kresnik showed up."

But what if he gets them out of the way the next time?

…

They also kept finding Keisuke and Midori dead. Abel was oddly dismissive.

Didn't you execute civilians in the last loop to save them, Atsuro wanted to ask, but he didn't. Who *knew* what was going in Abel's head half the time.

…

There was something about the gun. The glint of metal. The slight hint of rust. The thin scratches at the barrel.

Atsuro could stare at it for *hours*.

…

It was one of these loops. Things had gone down and now Abel was face-to-face against Yuzu. Compared to some of the more interesting ones, this was downright mundane. Normally now he'd start begging her to come along…

"She's in the way."

What?

"Uh, dude? That's Yuzu."

Abel did not answer. Instead he kept staring straight at her, eyes dark with intent, while she had prepared her COMP; sweating bullets yet not backing down.

Atsuro had a very bad feeling about this.

"Dude. No. Please. I don't like this."

"Then leave."

"…"

Leave? *Leave?*

Atsuro *never* left. No matter what Abel chose, he never left. No matter how many were saved or killed, he never left. No matter how Abel treated him, how Naoya – Cain – kept toying with him, he never left.

This was why he was the Anchor. This was why Masakado bestowed this crazy duty on him; because he was the only stable thing, the only steady one in the crazy rollercoaster that was Abel, and his ever-changing moods, his ever-changing plans and choices, the dozens unpredictable results that became hundreds that became thousands – a saint one second, a demon the next, and everything in-between and all of that at once.

Atsuro never left.

In the end, Atsuro thought idly, it did not really matter that Abel was looping. Things were always heading this way anyways.

He took out the gun.

"'Right, man. I'm leaving."

bang

[Nocturne], [Star Wars]
Tentative Trust
Author: Venku

He was C-3P0, Protocol Droid built to help facilitate human-cyborg communications. Programmed by Anakin Skywalker, he was fluent in over six million forms of communication. With the understanding of time's temporal issues, he was also a bartender. Working the Galactoplex bar, he provided another service, a place for beings to enjoy a refreshment and to unwind.

Like other bartenders, C-3P0 was able to stay abreast of current gossip. Said gossip included a list of MLE's or Malicious Looping Entities. These MLE's were loopers who chose to cause damage to Yggdrasil as a whole. Some, like the Tick and Billy, did so out of ignorance. Others, like DIO, did so out of maliciousness. Whatever the situation, an MLE gets put on a list shared with all the branches with a simple order: terminate on site.

Some MLE's get removed from the list. While this happens, they have to live with the consequence of their actions.

One such former MLE was Naoki Kashima.

…

Naoki Kashima is the Anchor for the Conception sub-branch of the Amala Branch. His duty was to keep his branch from suffering damage. He was to guide others who awoke. So far, those who awoke were a Pixie and a Jack Frost known as "Hee-Ho" and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Of those who awoke, Jack Frost and Pixie were Naoki's travel companions.

Naoki had tried and hoped others would loop. Chiaki, Isamu, and Hikawa he hoped would have looped. He'd even take Jyoji. On a separate issue, as he spoke with the Mainline branch anchor Steven about his concern, Steven had shown surprise when he referenced Jyoji.

The one thing about Yggdrasil? It chooses who loops. Unfortunately, it places people on solo loops without being aware of the potential damage done to that person's psyche. Sometimes the results are catastrophic.

Naoki had a loop on Equestria, the Sanctuary branch. Sadly, the tranquility of the Sanctuary loop did not have a positive effect on Naoki. Possessed by a hidden shadow who wanted to assert dominance, it forced Naoki to attack the branch. The attack, due to the brutal nature, labeled Naoki as an MLE. Nyx, the daughter of the Equestria anchor, tried to explain what happened. It did not help.

Eventually, his MLE status changed. While it changed, the consequences of his actions remained. Leman Russ, the Warhammer Anchor, still wanted to exact his pound of flesh from Naoki. Anakin Skywalker, one of the Star Wars Anchors, banned Naoki from the Galactoplex.

Anakin eventually revoked his ban from the Galactoplex. He did not pass the message on to Naoki.

…

Naoki Awoke. There was the standard Ping, as well as a note check of his pocket. Noting nothing out of the ordinary, he accessed his memories, then swore.

"Hee-Ho. What's going on, Naoki? You're cursing a lot-ho."

He turned to look at the voice that spoke. The dialect let him know that it was Hee-Ho. A short creature that his loop memories told him was a Talz with snow-white fur, Hee-ho was looking at Naoki in curiosity.

"We're in this branch with Anakin and C-3P0, and we have a meeting with a client at his bar!" Naoki clarified.

"Aren't you banned?" a feminine voice asked. Naoki turned to spot the speaker. A short woman with gossamer wings, her haircut seemed familiar. "Pixie?"

"Yes. The question remains." Pixie was about two heads shorter than her, though still an adult in form. She wore casual attire for this loop, which consisted of a tunic, and slacks. One hand remained on her hips.

"I am." Naoki's identity this loop was a smuggler who moved contraband. Hee-Ho was his muscle while Pixie was his ship navigator.

"Then you're screwed-ho!" Hee-Ho replied.

Naoki scowled. "Might as well see what we can do," he replied before leading them to the Galactoplex entrance.

...

The Galactoplex was a converted Death Star. C-3PO with the funding of the Equestria branch was able to convert it into a gigantic tourist mecca with floors catering to every desire a Looper might need. One of the main draws of the Galactoplex is the fact it is staffed by droids. Servers, maintenance, entertainers were all cybernetic beings.

A recent addition was security.

Naoki, Pixie, and Hee-Ho debarked from the shuttle that carried passengers to the bar. As they were walking through a security checkpoint, a loud klaxon went off.

"Hee-uh oh. I think Anakin still is angry." Hee-ho muttered. Pixie was looking around in curiosity as Naoki held his hands above his head.

"Follow my lead," Naoki replied as two repurposed SB1 Battle Droids approached.

"Warning. You are on a no authorization list. Proceed to terminate!" one droid replied as he started to charge his arm blaster.

Naoki began to curse as Pixie started to weave her hands together to cast a Zio spell.

"WAIT!" a loud mechanical voice called. "Wait just a moment. I am the owner of this establishment. Escort them to my office!" Naoki turned his gaze to spot a golden protocol droid approach.

"And now the boss comes..." he muttered. When the security droids powered down their blasters, two others showed up behind the trio. "Let's move!" one spoke in a loud voice.

...

Naoki, Pixie, and Hee-Ho arrived at a separate office. Though there were some trinkets as being a looper, the office was spartan in design with desks and chairs for non-droids.

"My most sincere apologies," C-3P0 began as he walked in. "I had to get off the comms with Masters Anakin and Luke."

"Are we still banned due to my actions when I was a MLE?" Naoki asked, a bit irritated.

"No, Master Kashima." C3P0 began. "When Master Anakin received word from Mistress Nut of your updated status, Master Anakin removed the ban." The proprietor droid thought it was not prudent to add that it was only after Masters Obi-Wan and Luke, as well as Mistresses Leia and Padme, continually harassed Master Anakin about revoking his ban.

"So what's with the security-ho?" Hee-ho asked.

"That was Master Anakin's suggestion, really," C3P0 commented. "For everyone's safety, unless classified as a threat, they are to stun any who have imbibed excessive spirits or are otherwise disruptive. Those who are on the banned list are to be liquidated with.." and his vocal modulator changed to reflect Darth Vader's voice. "Extreme prejudice."

Pixie shivered with what was said. "I see," she murmured.

Naoki cleared his throat. "So I can do business as a freelance entrepreneur?" he asked for clarification.

"As long as you behave and are not overt with any protocols broken," C3P0 confirmed.

Naoki nodded. "I can live with that," he replied, rising. As the meeting was over, they were allowed to leave C3P0's office.

"Huh. This trust thing...is kind of nice," Naoki muttered as they disappeared to one of the seedier levels.

[Persona 5], [Doki Doki Literature Club]
April Fools!
Author: smxsonic
Status: NON-CANON (no April Fools snip is canon)

The three members of the literature club sat attentively in their seats. Normally, club activities would be more freeform, but Monika was insistent on some kind of decorum in this

meeting.

Speaking of, Monika entered the room slowly and deliberately, Her gaze was down as she carried her books to the front desk. She was eerily silent as her bangs covered her eyes. The three other club members exchanged glances with each other, paying no mind to a black-haired boy sitting right beside them with his blonde companion.

"I am aware that this is very unusual for our meetings," Monika started, "But I needed to get a few things off my chest. This isn't something that's recent either, It's gone on since we started Looping"

Monika took a deep breath, "I've done… things that are unbecoming of not only the President of the Literature Club, but also Anchor of your branch."

Tears fell from Monika's eyes as she continued, "In your pursuit of attending to me, I've treated you like slaves, like children, and also as my pets. I've violated your privacy just for the sake of my own comfort and for that… I… I…

She couldn't finish her sentence as she broke down in tears, leaving the other Club members glancing at each other, waiting for one another to make the next statement.

"This… This is sort of extreme" Sayori finally said.

"The most self assured person I know is Incoherently blubbering in front of me," Yuri stated.

"That kind of Mind Control is… Unreal," Natsuki said.

"Hey!" The blonde teenager, Ryuji, shouted, "We don't mind control anyone, alright!?"

Yuri turned to the Blonde, she quickly spied the boy with messy black hair casually reading a volume of Magic Kaito. Her gaze gained a little coldness.

"Oh? Our club president is here confessing to things she'd never confess to, and you presume to tell a vampire that it's not mind control?"

"She's not confessing to anything she hasn't already done" The boy reading Manga said. He had many names but for the sake of consistency he calls himself Joker.

"Whether or not she actually did it isn't the point!", Natsuki yelled, "Look at her! Does this look like she's being helped."

Joker smirked, "Oftentimes, when one is helping one's self, this does happen."

"I see where you're coming from but still… This isn't right..." Sayori said, her eyes not leaving the club president.

"The situation is different from most of our usual targets for sure" Joker admitted, "Most of the people we steal from are the worst of the worst. They all had their reasons for doing what they did, but in the end they chose to be assholes."

Joker closed up the manga and stuffed it into his bag, while picking up another package from his bag.

"Another difference from our usual targets: They didn't have a support system once they confessed. Public opinion turned on them the moment we did what we do and they had no one to help them through it. They know they're bad people, but they have no desire to become better people. They're just content to wallow in their guilt, atoning for what they've done in only the most superficial ways."

He moved and gave the wrapped package to Sayori.

"Monika still has you, she'll not only move past this but she will be stronger for it with all three of you by her side, I think this will be proof of that."

Sayori opened the package to reveal a framed photo of the Literature Club, all of them smiling at the camera while writing in their notebooks. The Player Character and Sayori one side of the frame, Natsuki and Yuri on the other side, With Monika in the middle flashing her sincerest smile. A smile that Sayori hadn't seen in a long time.

"That was what we ended up taking from the Palace, but I think her real treasure is her friendship with all of you. And that's something that The Phantom Thieves could and would never steal."

He and Ryuji walked out of the classroom, with the three girls too awestruck to respond.

Yuri was the first one to shake her head, "Wait, that still doesn't change the fact that it's mentally invasive!"

They all looked around and saw no one in the room but themselves.

"Did he just Schmaltz us out of a debate?" Natuski asked.

Sayori sighed and wiped a tear from her eye, " Damn Persona loopers…"

[Persona], [Doki Doki Literature Club]
Velvet Kitchen
Author: Venku

Time is a gift to be treasured by all. When time is stuck on repeat, most view this opportunity to learn as they can.

Igor was one such being. Though he was aware of the ebb and flow of time, he also held a special responsibility. As an Anchor, it was his task to guide, if possible, Loopers. These Loopers would either be native to his branch or visitors.

He took this task as he did others. Philemon, his master, was aware of the Loops even though he was not Looping himself. As a part of Philemon's wager with Nyarlatoteph, Igor utilized the Velvet Room to guide their guest to their ultimate purpose.

These purposes ranged from a remarkable young man who was the barrier between a primordial desire to end things and humanity; to another young man who proved to a vengeful goddess how children of man do accept truths they'd rather ignore.

While he wished he could claim a guiding hand concerning a trickster and false hope and desires, he had to admit that his attendant bore the lion's charge for that miracle.

The Velvet Room, Igor's domain, served a purpose to Loopers and non-Loopers, guide them on their path. As a genius loci, it took on the shape of what the guest most needed.

Even if what the guest needed was a kitchen.

...

Natsuki Awoke. With millennia of understanding time's fickle nature, she thought she was immune to what the Tree sent her way.

The tree thought that she didn't spend enough time in *this* location.

The woman singing soprano in the background was the first thing she noted after accessing her Loop Memories and sending a Ping. She received quite a few responses in return. A small frown formed on her face. Before she could say something, a clear voice spoke.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room. Should you find yourself adrift in the sea of souls, know we provide a steady anchor for what's to come."

She turned her gaze to the other man. Noticing his *enormous* nose, Natsuki paused.

"You're the Anchor, right?" she asked

"Indeed. This is the Vel.."

He paused, holding up his hand as he issued a deep sigh. "Young Lady. Might I ask you not to touch the stove behind us?"

Natsuki paused as she turned to look over his shoulder. The setup was similar to the Looping Literature Clubroom, even down to the stove. There were three people in front of it. A tall, blonde man, a woman with curly hair, and a woman with short hair. A glance indicated they were related.

"Why?" she asked.

At that time a loud BOOOOOM could be heard as the shock wave reverberated through the Velvet Room.

The stove itself was destroyed. Black smoke rose from it while a black gelatinous blob oozed from the opening and began to run. The short-haired woman gave chase while the curly-haired woman used a fire extinguisher to smother out the flame on the blonde man.

Igor had a deadpan stare while surveying the damage, while Natsuki's left eye started to twitch.

"Can I...give them cooking lessons?" she asked, the urge to repeat what she did to Chie and others rising to the forefront.

"Be my guest" Igor responded. "They destroyed the method used on how to fuse Persona. And caused massive damage here."

The way his tone cut through the Velvet Room as a disappointed father caused the others, Elizabeth, Margaret, and Theodore, to turn their gaze to the duo. Igor just sighed and shook his head as Natsuki let loose a loud cackle.

Elizabeth paled. Her only thought? This might be a rough loop.

…

Meanwhile, in Inaba, Chie Satonaka and Yukiko Amagi were talking in the Amagi Inn. Both were awake and both were just catching up on gossip.

Suddenly Yukiko's spine stiffened. "Chie!" she gasped.

"I feel it too, Yukiko. It's as if some poor schlub managed to piss off that pink-haired girl." Chie responded.

Yukiko sighed. "Well. This loop may be interesting after all."

[SMT I], [Disney]
Small World
Author: Venku

Mickey Awoke. That was nothing new. He'd been doing this for far too long to be surprised by anything.

Well, he thought he would be surprised.

He first sent out a Ping and received four responses in return. Satisfied there'd be others here, he accessed his Loop memories. He was one of the rarely seen inhabitants of Tokyo Destiny Land. A spot where inhabitants murdered the surviving populace who did not prove strong enough.

Of course, Mickey shuddered. Murdering inhabitants went against everything he thought of and believed. The twin scimitars were placed in his Pocket as he heard a familiar voice.

"Mickey!" Donald rasped out. "Is that you?"

Mickey turned to look at Donald for a moment and visibly recoiled. "Donald, why do you have a chainsaw?" he asked.

"No idea. Do you know where we are?" Donald asked his friend.

"No. But we need to explore. Be careful. Do you have access to anything which might be able to help?"

"I can access my Kingdom Hearts Magic if you can access your Keyblade," Donald confirmed. "But they have strange names like Agi and Agidyne for Fire spells."

Mickey cleared his mind and held out his hand, attempting to summon his Keyblade. A warm, familiar weight appeared in his hand as he smiled. "Good. Let's go exploring, shall we?"

•••

While Mickey and Donald discovered the horror of Tokyo Destiny Land, Futsuo and Aoi were trying to navigate the building.

Futsuo was, for the longest time, one of the only other Loopers in the main branch. Able to summon and use demons, he was suffering from a symptom that infected everything. A Virus had infected his home and others with a similar setup.

This Virus had produced an event known as 'the Edit.' While unclear as to what others had done, Futsuo knew he both had to face a harsh truth and come to grips with a powerful daemon. A benefit from realizing harsh truths was that his partner, Aoi, had started Looping.

"Have we decided what path?" Aoi asked as they stood outside Tokyo Destiny Land.

Futsuo nodded. "We did Law last time and Chaos prior. I'm not in the mood to put up with Yoshio and Waruo being condescending."

"Fair enough. Did we discover who the two other Loopers were?" Aoi asked.

"No. And Steven has no memory either."

Aoi shrugged. Being sure that their party was ok, both Aoi and Futsuo entered Tokyo Destiny Land.

•••

"Agilao!"

Donald pointed his staff at two beings clad in Bronze that took a swipe at Mickey. After discovering both did not wish to work for this 'Echidna,' the Giants decided they needed to die.

A giant wall of fire shot forth, singing the twin Giants, distracting them. They did not see Mickey dart forward, slashing with his Keyblade. Both Giants turned into dust.

"How many floors is this place?" Mickey asked.

"I do not know," Donald replied. At the end of the battle, he held out his staff and shouted, "Media!".

"You're getting a better feel of this branch's spells," Mickey responded.

"Mmhm! Mickey! Look out!" Donald cried.

Approaching them were two gigantic purple beings with masks over their face. "Join Mother Echidna!" one called out.

Mickey and Donald rushed forward, giving them their answer.

...

Meanwhile, Aoi and Futsuo had bypassed one trainer who preferred to challenge others. Cerberus, Futsuo's preferred partner, had dispatched the trainer's daemons and was currently cleaning his paws.

"Strange," Aoi murmured. "I know you can not sense the feel of mana around us. There seems to be a buildup of energy like someone is about to release a big spell."

"Who is it?" Futsuo asked, concerned.

Before Aoi could reply, a loud shout echoed through the room.

"MEGIDO!"

Futsuo could only go "Oh shi.." before being enveloped in white light.

...

That white light? Aoi had an ability known as Traesto, which allowed for anyone with her to exit a dungeon.

Aoi and Futsuo were taking stock as they heard twin voices speak.

"I..I'm sorry," a raspy voice spoke. "I didn't realize that it would cause this much damage."

"We're out at least," another, slightly higher voice squeaked. "I just hope that blast didn't harm anyone else."

Futsuo approached and saw what he first thought were daemons. Preparing to attack, he was surprised as the mouse with the twin daggers spoke. "Nor harm the Loopers here."

"Excuse me!" Futsuo responded, identifying himself. Both the duck with the chainsaw and the mouse with the blades face him. "If I told you about a gigantic tree..."

"I'd be asking you if you felt moments of funniness. Oh, golly goodness! I'm so glad to meet a native Looper," the mouse replied. Approaching, his hand out, he spoke. "I'm Mickey Mouse. The duck behind me is Donald."

…

A few hours have passed as both the Amala Loopers and the Disney Loopers traded stories and information.

"Let me get this straight," Mickey spoke. "You're forced into this apocalyptic nightmare, and you have to choose which side you'll fight for?"

"Roughly yes," Aoi replied. "Though we had our fair share of problems."

"I'd say!" Donald exclaimed. Amala did have a reputation in other branches.

"It's not bad, though," Futsuo remarked. "Our Anchor is a swell guy and very intelligent. We're also starting to receive visitors from other Branches as well."

Donald could only make noises in agreement. Mickey, meanwhile, was reviewing the information. "You say that you carry Daemons in your arm terminal?" he asked. "And they exist in your Party via Magentite?"

"That's right," Futsuo responded. "Magnetite is a part of human essence here. Daemons need Magnetite like a Branch needs an Anchor. Without it, Daemons get sent back to their homeworld." He pulled out a small pouch with the black and purple rocks. "Why?"

Mickey grinned. "Just wondering if you could use our help. Especially since you did say you were fighting to stop both sides here."

Futsuo smirked. "Well. I'd say let us negotiate first."

In the end, Mickey and Donald joined Futsuo's party for an Arm Comp to review later and a steady supply of Magnetite and herbs from Aoi.

This iteration of their Loop proved to be easier in the long run with Donald and Mickey joining. It didn't hurt that with Donald's casting of Megido, both Mother Echidna and the Law Forces present perished. Law feared Futsuo's party and aggressively attacked them, while Chaos wanted to prove they were more powerful.

[Persona 5]
A Wolf Awakens – Zenkichi's Awakening
Author: Venku

Zenkichi Hasegawa was many things: Public Security Intelligence Agency officer, Kyoto Prefecture Police officer, widower, and father. The last two would play a part in his life, though all four would be tied together.

When his wife died, Zenkichi received a warning to cease looking into the person who ran her over. After some gentle persuasion, the person who gave him said warning threatened his daughter, Akane. With his daughter threatened, it caused him to cease any further investigations, to the dismay of his daughter. Realizing he needed help, he moved to Kyoto so Akane could be near her maternal grandparents.

As he focused primarily on his work, his boss Commissioner Miyako Kaburagi promised she would help him arrest the person who killed his wife. A part of his assignment was to investigate the current 'Changes of Heart.' Aware of what the self-styled Phantom Thieves did during the dubbed 'Antisocial Force' movement, the Public Security officers believed that the Phantom Thieves were responsible. Zenkichi was assigned to follow and obtain proof.

Although he initially gave information to indicate that they were under police scrutiny, Zenkichi realized that the Phantom Thieves were not the culprits Public Security made them out to be. At the most, as he thought, they were a bunch of High School students seeking their way in life. After a brief trip into what they called the 'Metaverse', he saw that the Phantom Thieves were telling the truth.

Under the guise of a summer trip through Japan, Zenkichi followed the Phantom Thieves during each stop. At each location, he was on hand to witness their interaction with a local 'hero' who was controlling the populace. Examples were Ango Natsume, the sub-par writer to the murdered director Shuzo Ubukata. His daughter, Akane, was not exempt from those seeking to 'control' others.

Realizing, as he confronted a cognition of Akane's anguish and anger, that he had lost sight of what it meant to be a cop, Zenkichi experienced an Awakening. This Awakening was where his cognition, his spirit of rebellion, reminded him of what was important. Accepting that truth and his code of Justice was what was important, Zenkichi obtained his Persona.

Adopting the code name of Wolf, Zenkichi joined the Phantom Thieves as they discovered the truth behind the new Change of Heart cases. Realizing that the new app EMMA had gained sentience and sought to provide humanity with the answers they seek, the Phantom Thieves were horrified that the end goal of the app was to eradicate human free will. Having dealt with this situation before with the False God, Zenkichi joined the Phantom Thieves for one final assault.

Showing EMMA the power of human perseverance, the Phantom Thieves went their separate ways. Zenkichi had his plans to pursue, including being a better father to his daughter. Going to bed later that night, he felt content.

...

He awoke the following morning and checked the alarm. Nothing startled him there. When he checked his phone, he was surprised. Instead of reading 2017, the year was 2016.

"Just how much did I have to drink last night?" he muttered, rubbing his eyes.

Getting dressed, he turned on the TV as he was preparing breakfast for Akane. Turning on the radio, he was lost in thought and wasn't paying attention. That is until he heard a news report that made him pause.

"This just in. The Phantom Thieves have struck again. This time, noted mobster Junya Kaneshiro surrendered himself to police..."

Zenkichi paused. "What just happened?"

…

It was not a fluke, that radio report.

Going through the motions of the day, Zenkichi realized that somehow he had gone back in time. Unable to have stopped his wife's death, he was able to move about and interact during the height of the Phantom Thieves case.

Realizing he had a chance to change some things, he went to Yongen-Jaya and made his way into Cafe Leblanc.

"Help you?" Sojiro asked. Though the man seemed to be a bit cold toward him, Zenkichi had to admit that Sojiro might have a reason to mistrust people.

"Oh. Just heard about the awesome coffee here, Boss" he replied as he moved to sit down. "Give me a house special, please."

"Fine. Here you go."

Sojiro, meanwhile, was what was known as Awake for this Loop. Having already met with the long-nosed Anchor and his ward, called Ren for this loop, they both were out looking for what Igor had referred to as a "potential new looper."

It was with this in mind that Sojiro paid closer attention to Zenkichi's words. The brief utterance of "Do right this time" seemed to signal something might have happened. "Why don't you come back later?" he asked the other man. "I'll get a fresh shipment of beans in and you can have the first taste."

"Really? Awesome! Thank you, Boss!" Zenkichi replied. He paid for the cup as he left. As he did, Sojiro sent Ren a text.

…

Later that evening, Zenkichi entered Cafe LeBlanc.

Inside, he was surprised. The young man whom he spent most of his summer with was inside and cooking over a stove. Sojiro was reading the paper and smoking a cigarette. There were no other customers in the store.

"Bad time?" Zenkichi asked. "And did you get the shipment?"

"Hate to tell you this," Sojiro began. "But I asked you to return for a different reason."

"Go on..." Zenkichi commented.

Surprisingly, Ren took the next question. "What do you know about Norse Mythology?" he asked, the pot of curry put to the side to cool.

…

"So you mean to tell me that our life is nothing but a simulation?" Zenkichi asked a few hours later. "And that we're stuck in some sort of cosmic rewind?"

"Pretty much," Sojiro responded. The cat, Morgana, came downstairs and was on the counter. After confirming that he too was a Looper, Morgana had chimed in during the discussion.

"Yeah. And there are other places you can go besides here. Go on, Joker! Show him the cloak!" Morgana chirped.

"Cloak?" Zenkichi asked.

Ren sighed and pulled out a rather intricate cloak and draped it over his body. Zenkichi spat out the remaining coffee at that, causing Sojiro to frown. "You wasted that cup of Blue Mountain!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I'm sorry Boss, but when Ren here disappeared..." Zenkichi began.

Ren removed the cloak and smirked. "As I said, sometimes you wake up in other locations."

"I see that! Alright. Say I believe you. What all do I need to know?" Zenkichi asked.

Ren and Sojiro gave each other a brief look. "Follow us. There's someone else you need to meet," Sojiro explained.

"Um..ok," Zenkici remarked. Morgana hopped into Ren's bag. "Anything I should know?" he asked.

"There's a couple of tricks," Morgana explained. "Primarily, a way for us to identify each other and how to access storage space. You need to know both. Also, not all of us are Awake at one time, but this Anchor is."

"Anchor?" Zenkichi asked.

"Think of it as a person who acts as Chief of Police, Quartermaster, and team cook," Ren elaborated.

"Ah"

...

"Ok wow. Just wow." Zenkichi replied as they took him to meet the Anchor. "Morgana, the Jails, and Persona are one thing to understand. Now you're telling me this long nose..." Zenkichi sighed. "Get it together, Zenkichi!" He might be just like some of the PubSec members.

"Not really, no" Igor replied, amusement in his voice. "Each of my assistance, if Awake, make a nose remark once a loop"

"All of them? Even Lavenza?" Joker asked in confusion. Seeing Igor's nod, Morgana finished the question. "Where is she?"

"She had some things to discuss with Elizab..." at that, there was the sound of a loud explosion and two women shouting.

"Lavenza! I can explain!" one called out.

With the sound of a chainsaw being turned on, the other one spoke. "Do you recall the dog food loop?!"

Igor sighed and rose. "Pardon me. I need to step in" he replied. "Zenkichi? Welcome to the Looping Velvet Room. You have the potential to be one of the amazing guests here."

As Sojiro, Ren, and Morgana escorted a confused Zenkichi out of the room, Sojiro took the time to laugh. "Hoo boy! I thought babysitting Ryuji and Morgana was something!"

There were sounds of laughter as Morgana complained about Ryuji and Zenkichi kept on looking about in confusion.

[Persona 5]
Rebirth – Akechi's Awakening
Author: Venku

Goro Akechi. Detective Prince, Student, an ally of the Tokyo District of the Special Investigation Department.

All of these titles describe the man. Yet, with all who wear a mask, they hide something else.

Akechi never knew his mother. When he was younger, she committed suicide due to having a child out of wedlock. Culturally speaking, the fact that his mother was a worker in Tokyo's 'Red Light' district; erased any other strides she may have made being a single mother. As a result, she took her own life. He was bounced around orphanages as a child, with nobody to provide a stable home.

During this time, presumably at the hand of the False God Demiurge, Akechi was given the power of the Wild Card. His two Persona, Robin Hood and Loki, were two different facets that he showed to everyone. One was the charming, elegant young man. The other was the raw, unbridled level of internal anger.

Through sheer determination, he had found out that his father was no other than Masayoshi Shido. Shido, leader of the Antisocial Force, was a rising politician. His goal was to steer Japan in a vision he had foreseen. Akechi's offer to the cause? The ability to induce 'Mental Shutdowns' or cause the person to suffer symptoms similar to a heart attack. He viewed himself as a hero in these situations.

Shido knew that this would be a valuable asset. He could discredit those who sought to block his purpose and then have them mysteriously die. Akechi, having already proven his skill in this regard, could fabricate evidence pointing to their corruption. Of course, Shido did his research and had realized Akechi wished to blackmail him. Considering that Shido always viewed himself as the consummate Chessmaster, he had contingency plans in place.

Overall, it was a darkly beneficial setup. Akechi took care of problems, while Shido capitalized on the situation. It would have run unopposed, save for one problem.

Shido had affected another person's life. A person placed on probation.

This young man, given access to the Velvet Room, was given a warning. Ruin was coming, and it was on him to change the path. Codenamed 'Joker,' he had discovered the mental shutdowns and the metaverse by accident as a member of the Antisocial Force chose to get rid of him and another student.

Suguru Kamoshida ran unopposed in Shujin Academy. A former Olympian, teachers, and staff looked the other way as he slaked his urges. When Joker and another man with the codename Skull challenged him about a student's attempt at suicide, he threatened them both with expulsion. Discovering the Metaverse by accident, Skull and Joker were given guidance by another being, codenamed Mona. When a victim of Kamoshida discovered the Metaverse by accident, she assisted them in taking down Kamoshida. With the codename of Panther, she joined Joker, Skull, and Mona in creating the 'Phantom Thieves of Heart.'

The goal of the Phantom Thieves? To counteract what they saw as shitty adults abusing their power unchecked.

Later joined by those with the code name of Oracle, Queen, Fox, and Noir, the Phantom Thieves took out other members of the Antisocial Force. Ichiryusai Madarame and Junya Kaneshiro, financial backers of the Antisocial Force, publically confessed to their mismanagement. Putting on a mask and claiming to be Medjed, another loss was suffered as Oracle, the true Medjed, took offense. Deciding to do a false flag operation, the Antisocial Force manipulated public opinion to have Kunikazu Okumura, father of Noir, declared a target.

Akechi, while silencing Principal Kobayakawa for his failure to find out the identity of the Phantom Thieves, killed Okumura after his confession. These murders caused the public opinion, always fickle, to sway against the Thieves.

Finally, Akechi was assigned the task of bringing the Phantom Thieves to justice. Integrating himself as another Persona user, he gave them an ultimatum: one final heist to change the heart of Sae Nijima, Queen's sister, after which they would have to disband. Feeling as if they were proverbially trapped, the Phantom Thieves agreed.

Befitting their namesake, the Phantom Thieves suspected something was amiss. Oracle, under the direction of Joker, utilized the surveillance of various phones, and cameras. Confirming that Akechi was a double-agent, they planned a reverse sting.

As planned, Akechi betrayed Joker, leading to his capture. During his interrogation, Joker had managed to convince Nijima, who had come to interrogate him, to listen to his story. Akechi, wishing to tie up loose ends, entered the room to kill Joker, thus ending the Phantom Thieves.

He failed in his attempt. Akechi killed a duplicate, false version of Joker.

Akechi learned of his failure as the Phantom Thieves challenged Shido. During the 'heist' to change Shido's heart, Akechi cornered his former colleagues. Ignoring their pleas to surrender, he openly challenged the party.

Blades drawn, replicants of guns fired, and the mysterious Power of Persona was used in this battle. During this time, Akechi removed his mask and revealed himself as the culprit of the mental shutdowns. His true Persona, his 'true self,' was known as Loki. Even with the fact that he killed Noir's father, the Phantom Thieves still tried to stop Akechi's rampage.

As Akechi lay defeated, he discovered that Shido knew of his betrayal. A cognitive version of Akechi, a version Shido always saw him as approached. Gun wielded, Akechi realized that Shido knew of his and took the first step.

Viewing Joker as a rival, Akechi managed to save the Phantom Thieves by shoving them through the door. Barricading it, he made one final request for the Thieves to change Shido's heart. He faced the cognition and chose to act as he always claimed, a hero.

Akechi was assumed to have died and was at peace. Even when the world experienced the illusions placed by Maruki, former Shujin Counselor, Akechi was the only one who did not buy the illusion. While the other Phantom Thieves did not treat him as a close ally, they worked with him to stop Maruki's attempt to place humanity under illusions.

Though assuming Akechi might be alive, but either out of respect or a wish to not pursue the situation, Joker did not confront him when he returned home at the end of the year.

...

Instead of the peace of death, Akechi awoke.

"Where am I?" he asked. "What bullshit is this?!"

Growling, he turned to face a digital clock in his room. That, and the calendar indicated that it was April of 2016. A quick search of his laptop let him know Shujin was due a new transfer student.

He growled. Though his rival might be alive, he was still not entirely happy with Joker. Wondering if the other Persona user knew what was going on, he prepared himself.

...

He went through his day, assisting the police and attending classes. As a part of his job as Shido's pet assassin, he knew who all was in the Antisocial Force. Irritable about the similarities between Kamoshida and Shido, he decided to lash out in his own way. Remove one person, one weak link, of the whole conspiracy. He hoped it would potentially alter things as well.

Under the guise of police investigation, Akechi went through the school and interrogated select groups of students. Recalling the situation with Shiho and Panther, Akechi had her placed under police custody under a trumped up charge. Firing off a text to have the police

take her to Special Victims, he put his phone in his pocket. "Can use Shiho's safety as blackmail" he muttered.

He didn't realize that Queen was waiting outside, and had heard that. Queen had sent off a text to the others who were awake. She also left her phone on silent record and sent the information to the group chat.

"Why are the police suddenly interested in reports?" she asked Akechi as she sat down.

Akechi shrugged. "There are certain crimes, even if they are late in being brought to life, Nijima-san," he began. "That are vile. Abuse of power and assault are two of them. And sometimes rogue animals need to be corralled." He didn't state that were he to have been abused like Shiho and Panther, he would have killed the person who did it.

As she left, Queen sent the recording to the group chat.

A call of the Phantom Thieves who were awake was issued. Meeting with the group, it was determined that Noir, Queen, and Joker would find out the truth and speak with him.

"What about Kamoshida?" Fox texted.

"Beat him up but don't push the change yet. Leave his Treasure alone. We need to use his Palace to bait Akechi" Joker responded.

...

Akechi accessed the Metaverse by using Kamoshida's passphrases: Suguro Kamoshida, Castle, Shujin Academy. He stepped through the shimmering portal and into Kamoshida's Cognition.

Dressed in black, as befitting his true nature, he navigated through the Castle. As explained in the Cognitive research, everyone had a secret desire. Those desires, if left unchecked, manifested in how that person viewed their surroundings. Some, like Kaneshiro, saw their homes as ATMs. Others, like Kamoshida, viewed their jobs as a castle, and they as the ruler.

Kamoshida's cognition, dressed in the kingly robes and nothing else, was asleep in his chair. Akechi approached, gun drawn, intending to silence Kamoshida as his one good deed.

The image of Kamoshida faded, replaced by a young man with a dark trenchcoat. Joker looked at Akechi and smirked. "Miss me?" he asked.

"What? What is going on?" Akechi almost shouted. As he did so, the lights disappeared for a moment. "How cute, Joker! Using lights for your illusions."

"It's not illusions!" a female voice called out. Refined and cultured, Akechi paused. "Noir?" he called out.

The lights flickered. Facing Akechi were Joker, Noir, and Queen.

"We already took care of Kamoshida, though I have to wonder," Queen began. Her biker leather and spiked knuckles gave Akechi pause. "Why you would even come here."

"What business is it of yours? Come, Loki!" Akechi shouted, summoning his Persona.

"Akechi!" Noir responded in concern. "Understand that while I still have my issues with you, this is a good sign!" Though Haru spoke, she pulled off her mask. "Milady! Psiodyne!"

As Haru's Persona sent giant balls of psychedelic energy to Akechi, Queen slid to the right of Joker. "We're not your enemy!" she all but shouted. "Johanna! Flash Bomb!" The manifestation of Queen's rebellion had shown itself as a motorcycle. The motorcycle charged toward Akechi before making a sharp bank. With the bank, it unleashed small explosives from its side.

"Enngh!" Akechi grunted as he growled. "Laevatinn!" The Norse god of Tricks spun his hands around and pointed at the trio, causing a flamethrower of fire to arc their way. Joker stepped forward and pulled off his mask. "Arahabaki!" As he spoke, a gigantic stone idol appeared and his eyes flashed. With the flash of eyes, a shield enveloped Joker, Haru, and Queen. Though the fire disappeared, each suffered some minor damage.

"Enough of this!" Joker all but shouted. "Akechi! While we can't forgive you, do you mean to tell me the man who called bull on Maruki's machinations is a weakling?"

This got Akechi's attention. "What are you talking about?"

"Your Persona is Loki," Noir spoke. "Tell me. What do you know about Norse Mythology?"

...

"Gods are screwing with things again?" Akechi asked. While he did not charge at them, he kept his blade drawn.

"Nobody knows," Joker corrected. "All we know is that we are repeating events."

"Besides," Queen interjected. "You're familiar with the Metaverse and Cognitive Psience. Is this so hard to believe?"

Akechi snorted. "What of it?" he asked. "Am I to behave and do as you all sa...what was that?" he snarled. Joker had surreptitiously pulled out a stick from his Pocket, his wand, and cast a silent disarming spell at Akechi.

"Proof we speak the truth," Joker replied idly. "Personally I want to continue our rivalry. And if you're Awake..we might ask you to forego some of your antics. Otherwise?" he asked. A small shrug. "Otherwise you're 'not' the only reformed crook who was given the gift of Looping."

"Gift?" Akechi asked, growling for a moment.

Noir nodded. "A gift. A chance to grow. I'm...while I have issues and still cannot forgive you, I truly wish you'd reconsider, Crow-kun." It was Noir's hope that using a familiar honorific

might breakthrough.

It did. Akechi visibly softened. "Rivalry. I could use that. But how will I know who is and who isn't Awake?"

"Come with us," Joker commented. A slight pause. "We'll take care of Kamoshida after you meet a few people and learn a few things."

"It changes nothing, so you know" Akechi replied. Though he was willing to hear them out.

"We know," Joker replied. He was a bit happy with this development. While he had his issues with Akechi's betrayal, Joker hoped that with Akechi Looping that they might be able to work out a peaceful coexistence.

Queen whispered in Joker's ear. "This will cause problems, you know" she murmured. "Skull and Panther, even if he is Looping, will give him grief."

"We can always argue that it's a part of his penance. And if he's Awake and too stubborn, Igor mentioned that the Investigation Team would love to talk to him" Joker replied.

"The original Detective Prince might wish to educate her successor. I see." Queen replied. "A hard sell but it can be sold to the others."

[Persona 5]
"Trickster…" – Lavenza's Awakening
Author: Venku

Lavenza, like her other siblings, is a resident of the Velvet Room. This Velvet Room is a place in the subconscious, near the Sea of Souls. Users invited by the Proprietor Philemon or his servant Igor are those who have had the hand of fate on them. They are involved either in the war-by-proxy between Philemon and Nyaralyhoteph; or when some ancient entity wishes to challenge humanity.

Unlike her siblings, Lavenza had a bit of a difficult journey ahead of her. The False God, Demiurge, had somehow managed to circumvent and enter the Velvet Room, banishing Igor. To compound matter, Demiurge split Lavenza into two separate beings. Demiurge had settled himself down and pretended to be the new ruler of the Velvet Room, with his assistants Caroline and Justice, otherwise known as Lavenza.

Every Wild Card entered the Velvet Room for an explanation of their power. They would sign a contract with Igor, basically stating they took responsibility for their actions. Through their journey and the relationships they forged with people, romantic or platonic, they learned how to master their ability.

Caroline and Justine, or Lavenza, was one such forging. They carried the time-honored tradition of forging a bond with the Wild Card, as Theodore Elizabeth and Margaret did before.

This bond forged with Caroline and Justine proved to be of benefit. When the Trickster, otherwise known with the codename of Joker, fought against the False God, he had ordered them to subdue Joker. Both Caroline and Justine were unable to complete their task, allowing for a small faint trickle of their true personality to be revealed. Imploring Joker to fuse them as if they were two Persona, Lavenza was reborn.

The False God, aware of the cards stacked against him, offered Joker a deal. Rule with him, and be a god among the populace. Joker refused, forcing the False God to disappear and for the Proprietor of the Velvet Room to resume command.

Reuniting with his allies, Lavenza explained that she helped make Mona to take her place. As a last act of defiance, before she was split in two, Lavenza helped to create Mona to take on the role of 'Guide' similar to her and her siblings. Mona's revelation did not change how Joker and his allies felt about Mona. They viewed him as a Phantom Thief, one of the original creators.

The Phantom Thieves challenged the False God. Even though it appeared that they would perish, salvation came from an unlikely source. The fickle people of Tokyo, encouraged by those Joker had befriended, shouted praise and encouragement to the Phantom Thieves. As perception shapes reality in our world, so too does it affect those in Mementos.

Revitalized, the spirit and energy gathered by the masses of Tokyo allowed for Joker to summon his ultimate Persona. Toppling the False God, the Phantom Thieves sent a strong message, as did S.E.E.S. and the Investigation Team before. That message? Mankind's fate is in their own hands.

Of course, like any other message, that message had to be forcefully repeated. The first message was to Maruki and his wish to give man their inner wish and desire. EMMA, another version of the False God Demiurge, was another who needed that lesson enforced.

With man's fate in their own hands, Lavenza disappeared with Igor, the contract with Joker fulfilled.

...

Lavenza awoke, surprised to feel the urge of being needed. She was even more surprised when she checked on the date.

"April 2016?" she asked. "But that means...NO!"

She ran out of the room before the False God could take control. While it could be considered as her abandoning her position, she viewed it more as protecting the sanctity of the Velvet Room and its goals.

With her, she took the Persona Compendium, a registry of Persona that a Wild Card achieved. She also took Margaret's bookmark, Theodore's Butler Cap, and Elizabeth's Ominipetent Orb. Those she viewed as mementos of her siblings.

As she ran past the door to the outside, she was not paying attention to the person she bumped. If she had, she would have noted that Theodore was standing there.

"Why is Lavenza running?" he asked. Awake this Loop, he had detected an anomaly from Shibuya. At the request of his Master and the local Anchor, he had gone to investigate.

He wondered, idly, if Lavenza was aware of time's flow. A part of him hoped so, as they were a family. As a family, he believed, they could face anything together.

Marveling at the technology of a recent loop, he pulled out a small communication device. A message was sent to others Awake, also asking for assistance. Surprisingly, Margaret, Yu, and Joker replied they would be near Big Bang Burger.

Theodore left, seeking to track down his sister.

...

Lavenza, naturally, was a bit concerned about everything. She knew what was in fate for her Trickster. What was coming to challenge the world. She felt powerless due to the no interference clause all attendants of the Velvet Room had to follow.

Recalling a challenge that her Trickster faced at a fast food location, she had hoped to meet him there. Entering Big Bang Burger, she made it to the counter before placing her order.

"Hello! I would like..."

"A kid's meal?" the employee asked. "500 yen please."

"Pardon! I'm not a kid!" Lavenza's tone started to take on an annoyed lilt. Opening her mouth to say something else, she kept quiet as a hand touched her shoulder. Turning around to smack the person who touched her, she was shocked to see her big brother Theodore.

He winked at her before nodding to the cashier. "One kid's meal. One Captain's Delight. Four sodas." Lavenza thought that it was unique that Theodore was ordering so much food.

Taking the order, Theodore led her to a side booth where sat Margaret, a man with grey hair, and her Trickster! Lavenza turned to look at Theodore in curiosity.

"All will be explained, I promise. Including the sense of strangeness, you feel," Theodore promised.

...

They had taken their meal to a quiet booth before looking around. Lavenza, after a few hours had passed, asked a question. "If I understand, time is set in reverse but not by a calamity...?"

"You can describe it as one," the grey-haired man known as Yu Narukami explained. "It's something that is higher than the challenges like Izanami or the False God."

"Is there anything that we must do?" Lavenza asked.

At that, Margaret shook her head. "Go through the day. Assist our Wild Cards" as she gave Yu's shoulder an affectionate squeeze, Margaret nodded to Joker. Joker, Lavenza noted with affection, was devouring the Captain's Burger.

"Must you?" Margaret asked in annoyance.

"It's like his Big Beef Bowl," Joker replied. At that, Yu Narukami nodded in understanding.

"Anyway..." Joker elaborated. "We just go through things. Sometimes we handle deviant variations. Rarely we will be given an order from a being higher than Philemon. Our Anchor usually relays that request."

Lavenza lifted her eyebrows at that. She knew of Philemon. "Who's higher than that? And who is our.." she paused. "Anchor?" It was a foreign word to her.

Margaret smiled. "Come, little sister," she replied. "Let us take point and let's see if you paid attention to Elizabeth's song."

The order paid, Theodore Yu and Joker followed behind Margaret and Lavenza. As they left, Margaret sang in a very low-key voice. "Vel vel vel, Velvet Room. My Master has a very long nose!"

Lavenza gasped, then smiled. "Truly?"

"Truly" Margaret confirmed. "He will say it again, but.." she cleared her throat. "Welcome to the Looping Velvet Room, Lavenza. Dear sister. You have such amazing potential."

Miscellaneous 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Fate/Grand Order], [Persona 5], [JoJo's Bizarre Adventure], [Star Wars], [Sword Art Online], [Gurren Lagann], [Yu-Gi-Oh!], [Mario Bros], [Fire Emblem: Three Houses] Looper Summonings
Author: Anata_Suruu aka Vaati Star

[Persona 5]

Lavenza

"Servant, Ruler," the girl in blue bowed before looping up. "My name is Lavenza, attendant of the Velvet Room. A pleasure to make your acquaintance. Now then, shall we work towards rehabilitation?"

…

[Jojo's Bizarre Adventure]

DIO

"You were expecting another Servant? Nay! There is only me, DIO!" The man yellow threw his arms out, posing menacingly. "I serve no one, yet this world has been set ablaze. Therefore in my own interest, we shall work together for a time. Now bow before DIO."

…

[Star Wars]

C-3PO

The golden robot raised an arm in a small salute. "I am C-3PO, and I have been summoned as a Moon Cancer." he tilted his head. "Pardon, Moon Cancer? What sort of Class is this? Oh, my apologies. A pleasure to meet you young Master. I look forward to working with you.

…

[Sword Art Online]

Kirito

The young man in black smirked as he rested a sword across his shoulder. "Servant, Saber. Kazuto Kirigaya. You can call me Kirito, the Black Swordsman." He blinked. "Eh? Can I shoot beams? What do you mean, what kinda swordsman shoots beams?" His eye twitched. "What do you mean 'most of them!?' Are you telling me I'm a poor swordsman?"

…

[Gurren Lagann]

Kamina (Saber)

"SERVANT! SABER! I, Kamina have arrived, a member of team Dai-Gurren!" several moments pass before his sighs. "Great, I seem to have been summoned in my weakest class. But that's alright, even with just a sword, we'll make our way forward together. That's how team Dai-Gurren rolls. Welcome to the crew."

Kamina (Rider)

"Yo! My name's Kamina. Servant Rider!" He strikes a pose, arm up, and a flash from his finger from the light behind him. "Me and Gurren are here now! Here to pierce the heavens! Together Master, we're gonna save the world from anyone who thinks they can burn it. They'll get to know… JUST WHO THE HELL DO THEY THINK WE ARE!?"

Kamina (Alter Ego)

"High Servant, Kamina. I have combined into my ultimate form. The greatest aspects of me as a man together. One class cannot contain me. Technically, that makes me an Alter Ego class servant. But enough talk, let's kick logic to the curb Master. Team Dai-Gurren, moving out!"

Kamina (Grand Lancer)

A flash of lighting, a drill falling from the sky. Everyone in the temple shielding their eyes as the man appeared.

No, not just a mere man. A Man in the form of a God. He was blue flame, the power of the spiral incarnate, with only a set of red shades and a glowing cape of red flame giving the blue flame a semblance of human form.

"I AM KAMINA! THE GRAND LANCER! Master… Your hopes, your dreams, and your will have called me here. The power of the Spiral surges within me, and with it, any dream is possible, anything can be done, and anything can be surpassed. Even gods can be beaten. Even beings who claim to be beyond such things! The full might of Olympus… every part of the pantheon, put together, combined into one ultimate being."

There was a grin in the flames, even the lack of a mouth could not hide such exuberance. "You claimed that this great destroyer, this machine made of twelve true Gods, was unmatched. WE SHALL NOT JUST MATCH IT! WE SHALL SURPASS IT!" He raised his hand, a volcano exploding somewhere in the background, made manifest just by his will, and destroyed by it. "Let's show the Gods themselves how team Dai-Gurren rolls! My form is that of the Super Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann! Beside us stands the Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann. And here we stand in a pocket universe, made manifest for this battle and this battle alone! Then there shall be nothing holding us back! Come Master! Let us be the drill that pierces the heavens!"

…

[Yugioh]

Yugi & Atem

"Oh, hi there. I'm Yugi. I seem to have been summoned as a Caster…" he looked a little amused. "It seems my abilities aren't exactly great. I mean, I'm just a good duelist, and King of Games. But I think my partner might be of more help. Here, I'll let him speak."

There is a flash of light, and Atem takes over, the small body of Yugi changing to that of Atem in his form.

"I am Atem, and my Class is Rider. Like Yugi, I share the title of King of Games, and I am a Pharaoh of Egypt. I was once a nameless Pharaoh, lost to time, but with my name found once more, we'll be lending our power to your cause." he smirked. "It's time to duel. Let's go find someone to show the error of their ways."

…

[Mario Bros]

Bowser

"Bwahaha!" the giant turtle crossed his arms, smirking. "You called for the King of Awesome? Of course you did. I'm Bowser, King of the Koopas. And… A Servant!?" Bowser grit his teeth, before calming down. "Fine. I'll put up with it, but order me to do anything with those things and we're gonna have a problem. My Class is Rider. Bah, why am I not a Ruler! I'm a king!"

Kamek

The blue clad wizard sighs before looking up. "Alright, I get it. Hi, I'm Kamek, Servant Caster, if it wasn't obvious from the hat. Normally I'd be serving King Bowser, but it seems I've been called here to help save the world. Well, can't rule the world if there isn't one, so I guess I'll pave the way for my king's arrival." They adjust their hat. "Now Master, I'll leave the orders to you."

Luigi

The green clad plumber takes off his hat. "Oh hello there. My name's Luigi, Class Assassin. Normally I'd be working alongside my bro, but… well. My bro isn't here. But if he isn't here to help save the world, I'll help save it myself." He smiles, holding out his hand. "Shall we work together then?"

Daisy

The princess clad in orange snaps her fingers, and winks. "Hey there kiddo. I'm Daisy, called to Chaldea as a Caster class Servant. Don't exactly know why, magic's more Peach's thing, but I guess I can substitute." She blinked, "Wait! Did this thing confuse me with Peach!? Is

that why I've got her magic? This is her power. Augh… well, probably should put it to good use anyway. Let's go kick some ass."

…

[Fire Emblem: Three Houses]

Dimitri

"Servant, Lancer. My name is Dimitri Alexandre Blaiddyd. I'm the leader of the Blue Lions house, and look forward to working with you Master." The young man bowed before shaking his head. "Don't worry, I'll be here to help you through your trials."

Edelgard

"My name is Edelgard von Hresvelg, Emperor of the Adrestian Empire. I've been called here under the Class of Berserker. Hmph, I don't believe this 'Madness Enhancement' to be of any issue, I'm fine with following another's orders if they make sense. So then 'Master', are you capable of leading us to victory, or must I take control?"

Claude

"Hey there," the brown skinned man gives a small salute. "Name's Claude, and I've been summoned as an Archer Class Servant. You're the Master here right? That's good, that means you're the tactical one. Now, I'm not one for fighting all the time, but with you and me working together, I'm sure we'll find a way to save the world without all of the bloodshed. Come on, let's get started."

[Persona 4], [My Little Pony]
Major Kuma
Author: Conceptualist

Teddie struggled Awake with a prodigious yawn, stretching his jaws wide open before letting them satisfyingly snap shut. Rubbing the sleep out of his exhausted eyes with a forepaw, he mentally reviewed his Loop Memories.

'Okay, literal bear again. Ha ha, Yggdrasil. Bear-y funny. Middle of hibernation season too.' Stumbling to his hind feet, rubbed his back on a nearby stalagmite. *'Oh yeah, that's the spot. So, priority #1. Find civilization. Then get myself put up in a good zoo somewhere, and enjoy lazy zoo bear stuff.'*

Absent-mindedly wondering what kind of fish the zoo keepers would feed him this time, Teddie heard some other Looper Ping and sent out his own reply. Not counting his own, there were six other Loopers Awake. Not bad numbers for one of his un-bear-ablly common Real Bear Loops. Wondering if he was near Inaba or in some other Loop, Teddie meandered out of the cave he had been slumbering in.

Then Teddie blinked in confusion.

Those trees were not native to Japan. Teddie didn't recognize the exact species, but that was irrelevant to the fact he could easily see over the tops of what looked like full grown trees.

Checking out his deep purplish-blue fur in the sunlight, and how he could see specks of light twinkle and shine like stars, Teddie wondered where he was this time.

'Maybe this won't be a zoo-bear vacation after all…'

…

The journey was a long one. Not because Teddie was slow or anything. At his size, a leisurely gait ate up the distance deceptively fast. No, it was long because he just didn't fit on the trails and paths the smaller animals had carved into the forest. Eventually Teddie found a river and just waded himself downstream. Even in the biggest, deepest parts he didn't even need to lift his head up fully.

The remaining lethargy Teddie was fighting through was easily shaken off by the cold river water, which was useful. Don't exactly want to fall asleep so soon after he Woke Up. He might miss something interesting!

Like these trees. At some point the river Teddie was following crossed into what appeared to be a large apple orchard. Must have been back when Teddie was admiring his bear-y fierce reflection. He had become a good judge of ursidae fitness over the years, and by any standard he was a fine top of the food web predator. Which was probably why everything was avoiding him on the walk out of the woods.

He didn't really remember eating much other than things his Unawake self had hunted. But, based on the shape of his teeth… Teddie reached out a paw to one of the apple trees, and the biggest, juiciest, most delicious looking apple on that tree floated to him in a cushion of the Force. Levitating it infront of his enormous snout to take a gentle sniff, the apple smelled good to eat. Paw-fect.

Opening his massive jaws and curiously dropping the delectable smelling tiny red fruit on his tongue, Teddie bit down and tasted what was definitely the best apple he had ever had in he very long life. Letting out a low growling moan of delight, Teddie immediately coughed and cleared his throat in what he hoped was a masculine manner. *'I hope nobody heard that, or I would be so em-bear-assed.'*

Looking around hopefully, Teddie didn't find any people around. Just apples, apple trees, a tiny pony, and more of the river. Good. Nobody was around to see him audibly emasculate himself.

Wait a moment.

Eyes widening in panic, Teddie snapped his head back to the tiny pony standing just on the shore. Yellow coat, red mane, pink bow, and staring right at him. Merely a paw's length away from his snout now.

'Shoot this *is where I am?'* Teddie thought in panic. Gently chuffing in surprise, the force of Teddie's exhale knocked the filly back on her flank.

The pony screamed in Teddie's face, causing him to rear back away from her. It was supposed to put some distance between them so she wouldn't panic, instead of leaving her within a paws' length of his jaws, but unfortunately for Teddie it had the opposite of his intended effect. With the gigantic bear reared up to his full bipedal height, his shadow threw the filly into darkness.

This proved to be the final straw. He could feel her mind make the switch from stunned awe to raw terror in an instant. The growl Teddie accidently let slip, forgetting for half a second that he didn't have the right kind of vocal cords to talk at the moment, just solidified the tiny filly's plan of action.

Scrabble herself around, the filly made beeline for a group of similar presences Teddie could feel in the Force. Her family, presumably. She was screaming her head off all along the way about how "A giant bear was going to eat all the apples!"

'Oh dear, I hope that doesn't end up being a thorn in my paw…' worried the massive ursidae. Teddie gently and slowly lowered himself back down to all fours, and tried to quietly slink away. It was hard to miss his lumbering form towering over the nearby apple trees, but he made an honest effort to be stealthy after this first blunder.

...

The river eventually wound its way out of the groves and into a decently sized little lake. Deep enough in the middle that Teddie actually had to raise his head up, but not so deep that he could continue walking on all fours.

Sitting down and slouching a little to let the lake water hide his bulk, Teddie settled in for the moment. If he was in pony land, or equestrian world, whatever Spike had called his home loop, hopefully there would be some local Loopers around to smooth out this misunderstanding. He wasn't some lumbering Kaiju here to steal all their produce; Teddie was a gentle-bear! All he would steal were the ladies' hearts!

Although, considering his current size, maybe he was supposed to be a Kaiju of some kind. Teddie didn't think that the pony's normal loop had giant super beasts like he seemed to be, but it could always be a weird variation that he was caught in.

'Hmm. What a dilemma. On one paw, I could get to be the giant monster and play Godzilla for a Loop. On the other paw, do I really want my first visit to pony land to be a monster stomp?' So caught up in his deliberation was Teddie, that he completely missed the groups of pegasi rounding up every loose cloud in the sky into one giant thunderhead. The only warning he got was the lightning bolt slamming down somewhere past the shore he was gazing at.

All he knew was that he was in the middle of a lake, *and there was lightning flashing down!*

Now, what was supposed to happen was, as a presumably wild animal, the lightning bolt and boom of thunder would spook him into running as far away as possible. At least, that's what the weather ponies the scared out-of-town Apple family members had asked for help were planning on. Unfortunately for their plans, Teddie was smarter than the average bear.

'Lightning never strikes the same place twice!' Teddie remembered. As such, his first instinct was to run directly towards the place lightning had just struck. This happened to be the exact opposite direction he was supposed to be going. Which is why moments later, Teddie crested the shore, stumbled up the hill and emerged soaking wet into the outskirts of Ponyville.

This, of course, was followed by much screaming panicked ponies stampeding under and around the bear, and Teddie was forced to slam his understrength precognition into its absolute limits to avoid squashing someone underpaw. However, opening himself to the Force that much and that way unprepared had a nasty side effect; Teddie got caught up in the torrent of emotions that over a hundred spooked ponies were generating.

It was a very confusing seven to eleven minutes. By the end of it over a dozen buildings were accidentally destroyed, the entire population of town had stampeded out of town, and a group of six mares and one dragon had risen to the occasion to save the day.

Teddie had only rarely been so humiliated in his very long life. He'd been blasted with full sized party artillery, swept up in a surprise tornado, pelted back with a hail of gemstones, teleported miles high into the air, only to be driven into the ground with a flying pile driver from a purple dragon twice his size. Admittedly, the herd panic Teddie had accidentally tapped into had been making him completely erratic, irrational, and triggered him into swinging the first few paw strikes.

But now he was hog tied like a common show cow, and a different yellow pony, a pegasus this time, was forcing him to stare deep into her stare. No. Into her Stare. It deserves the Capital Emphasis.

"Now take a deep breath in," she demanded, and Teddie followed along with her orders. He couldn't think of doing anything else. "Hold, hold, and relax. Let all those feelings go. Lets just," she took another big breath, shallower than the last. Then after holding it in temporarily, she sighed out a final "Relax."

Teddie was calm. A drop of water in the ocean, a single sand grain on the beach. Everything was washing over and under and past him. With a final shudder, and the helpful calming voice to focus on, Teddie disconnected himself from the emotional turmoil he'd been hijacked by.

"There, there. You poor little thing," whispered the pegasus. "My name's Fluttershy. Can you tell me what happened?"

Before Teddie could even figure out what to say and how he was going to say it, another pony wearing a cowboy hat came stomping into view. "I'll tell ya what bucking happened! This 'poor little' critter of yours ate my cousin Braeburn!"

Oh.

Oh no.

Teddie was out of it during the fight, completely not in control at all. Did his instincts… He didn't remember- It was such a blur, could he have- *'I think I'm going to be sick.'*

"WAIT!" screamed a familiar voice. The filly from the orchard came galloping down the destroyed street. "Applejack wait! You're not listening!"

"Apple Bloom, get away from here! It's a pony eater!" the panicked Applejack shouted!

"Hold on, I got her," a cyan coated and rainbow maned pegasus declared. Swooping down, she grabbed the squirming yellow filly and flew up out of Teddie's potential reach.

Continuing to struggle, Apple Bloom yelled "I said it ate an apple-"

"Yeah, Cousin Braeburn!"

"-from the trees, you clod-hopper! One apple! I was worried about the harvest, not our lives!"

Applejack, slack-jawed, stared at Apple Bloom. "But, but, what happened to Braeburn? He wasn't there at head count!"

"He's with the Appaloosa settlers, ya dolt." Apple Bloom, at this point, was more exasperated and resigned to being carried than anything else. "Don't you remember his postcard apologizing for not coming to help this year?"

Applejack was floored by this, and sat down on her haunches as the adrenaline began to fade. "Well shoot. Don't ah have egg on my face."

For his part, Teddie was relieved he hadn't committed some form of cannibalism during his rampage.

Nobody remembered who started chuckling first, but everyone was laughing at the absurdity of the situation shortly afterwards. Teddie's deep belly laugh actually shook the ground enough to knock what was left of a nearby building down, which set off another round of hysterics from the group.

…

It took the rest of the day to round up all of the missing town's folk, a task that Teddie was being kept far away from.

The purple dragon- who Teddie recognized as Spike as soon as he shrank down to a more reasonable size -led the way back to Sweet Apple Acres. All of the ponies had stampeded away from there, since that was the direction Teddie had wandered into town from. And the Apple Clan was being "Mighty sorry about the confusion," and had subsequently offered their land to hide on until the misunderstanding was straightened out.

So long as Teddie only ate apples and not Apples, as Granny Smith confusingly stated.

Twilight Sparkle had helpfully gifted Teddie with a bit of advanced spell work that let him speak normally, as apparently the natural magic resistance of the Ursa Major he had replaced would interfere with many lesser methods of translation. It was better than Teddie's idea of a giant white board, at least.

Spike and Teddie had been talking since they found an orchard valley Teddie could unobtrusively hide in. Mostly about the fight that just happened, as it was just a massive blur for the bear other than the very beginning and the last few moments.

"-and then, after seeing me bodyslam you through Golden Oaks from a mile up, Applejack just charges into the wreckage with this freaking huge rope."

Teddie was just amazed at what had already been told. "And she's the only one out of the seven of you not Awake this loop?"

"Eyup," the dragon confirmed. "That's just good old Applejack for you. Now, the rope she was using is normally for helping anchor cloud houses in place during renovations. It's nearly half a foot thick, a mile long, and here she is, making a lasso and tieing you up while you were still dazed and semiconscious."

Teddie sighed. "I remember pretty much everything after that. I really am sorry about all this. It just spiraled out of control so fast, I could bear-ly keep from crushing someone. Then they panicked and…"

Spike grimaced. "I could feel that all the way from the halfway point between here and Canterlot. Twilight and I had to teleport the rest of the way to Ponyville early. What happened?"

Teddie stayed silent. It was obvious to Spike that he wanted to answer, but also that Teddie didn't like the only answer he had.

"Buddy." Spike reached up and gently put a clawed hand on the bear's massive forepaw. "I can't help you if I don't know why you lost yourself in the Force. And if this is happening to you, an experienced Jedi Looper, it could be happening to any of us."

"It's a personal problem," Teddie bit out. "Nobody else would have to deal with it like I do."

Spike stared at Teddie meaningfully.

"I mean it. It's-" Teddie cut himself off and huffed, the wind of his forceful breath rattling the apple trees all around them. "Alright. If I'm explaining this, I need to know how much you know about me first. In my baseline."

Spike shrugged. "You're some kind of mascot costume come to life, right? Not the weirdest backstory for a Looper I've heard, but it's pretty up there."

"Not even close." Teddie kneaded furrows into the ground with his claws. "I'm a Shadow."

Spike was taken aback by that. "Who's Shadow?"

"Not someone's Shadow. *A* Shadow. There are two types. The personal type of Shadow, which comes from a specific person and is their inner self and suppressed feelings. Then there is the other kind, my kind. Manifesting from the hidden sides and suppressed emotions of the collective human unconscious."

"Hold on," Spike said, raising a claw questioningly. "I've been to a Persona Loop before, and this answers some questions I still had. Are all of the little enemy Shadows just fragments of this collective human unconscious?"

"Yes and no," Teddie shrugged. "The weaker ones, the ones you encounter by the hundreds, yes. The stronger they are, the less common they are, the more likely they come from a specific human mind instead of just the mess of all of them. It varies, and it's not that helpful because weak Shadows will conglomerate into a stronger single Shadow eventually. Usually those have a personal type of Shadow as the core."

"So… What does this have to do this morning?"

"I'm a fragment of the collective human unconscious that grew fascinated enough with humanity and people to develop my own personality, and turned myself into an existence that is self-perpetuating instead of dependent on the passive subconscious reinforcement of humanity's existence," Teddie deadpanned. "Part of me, the real me under all this temporary meat and bone, is meant to be piece of that collective state of existence. The Force can bridge that gap temporarily, revealing part of my true nature and leaving me at the whims of the parts of the collective unconscious that's in range of me."

Spike frowned. "Cut through the techno-babble for me here. I don't exactly like what I'm hearing, and I want to make sure I understand."

"I'm made of other people's emotions and feelings at the core. If I push the Force too hard, especially with the wrong Force powers, I feel what everyone nearby feels and stop thinking like a person."

"That's what I thought." Spike was considered something, and looked very thoughtful. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but have you tried giving up the Force?"

"Yes. It makes the problem *worse*, if you can believe that." Teddie looked away uncomfortably. "It's not a problem with the Force. It's something from my baseline. I've actually talked to my Admin about it. Fixing it wouldn't really be possible without messing with who I really am, if it was possible at all. If I lose the Force, I can have the same kind of reaction but it works on the collective unconscious of everyone in the Loop instead of just the emotions of people nearby. It's harder to trigger that way, but once it does, I'm completely unraveled until the reset zips my head back on straight."

"The Force gives you a layer of separation," Spike concluded. "A different, safer, more controlled way to interact with this collective unconscious. Because All is One in the Force, but a Jedi can control how much of themselves they let it affect, how deep they go. With one downside."

Teddie nodded. "If I get too caught up in nearby emotions, while pushing my connection to the Force to my limits, I risk going bear-serk for a little while instead of going crazy for the rest of the Loop."

Spike pursed his lips and raised an eyeridge. Teddie had been doing so well, only two slip ups since they started talking.

"Sorry, sorry. Force of habit, I bear-ly, I mean, barely notice when I do it," Teddie apologized. "I am serious about this. No jokes, no puns. Too much rapid precognition, emotional manipulation, or explicitly Dark Side powers tend to trigger an episode. It's why I mostly stick to illusions, healing, and telekinesis."

From there, the conversation slowly progressed. The details behind the exact mechanics of Teddie's issue were fascinating for a Jedi like Spike, who had never had any real problems quite like that before. Actually, talking about his issues with another Looper seemed to take an unseen weight off of Teddie's shoulders.

But it had been a little while since they had last seen each other, and Spike did have an entire photo album or three of his Looping Padawan's adventures to share. Teddie was really surprised Spike had found someone so fast. He had been so patient sounding when everyone was discussing how they were organizing the Looping Jedi Order and what little rules they had.

But eventually they ran out of things to talk about, just around sunset for the day.

"So, how much do you know about our Loop?" Spike asked.

"Not much, just what you hear in passing. I got my paws on your Hub Loop tv show once, but wouldn't be caught- um…" Teddie trailed off awkwardly.

Spike snorted in amusement, shooting a tiny burst of green sparks out of his nostrils. "Let me finish that for you: 'Be caught dead watching Saturday Morning Cartoons for little girls.'"

Teddie looked off into the distance purposefully. "It really is a bear-y lovely little Loop you have. I wouldn't want to insult it."

"Let me put it this way then. This morning was *normal* for us. Maybe not the power levels involved, but a random disaster that nearly destroys the town or worse happens all the time. The next major disaster actually happens later tonight."

"... I'm listening."

"How about let's go find out where they moved the Summer Sun Celebration to, and you save us all from Eternal Night when her majesty Nightmare Moon shows up."

…

The Apple family was apparently hosting the moved celebrations, as the town hall was still too busy being rubble to be a viable venue. An open air celebration was hastily assembled,

and the Loopers threw their considerable abilities into getting it ready in time for the town's folk to arrive.

Most of the ponies gave Teddie a wide berth, but that was more a healthy amount of caution over staying out from underpaw than actual fear of him. A version of the situation had been disseminated to them all, and most of them were fine now. The flower selling trio had been given blinders for the moment, and were temporarily satisfied at not seeing the danger lurking among them all.

Just like Spike had said, a midnight black Alicorn came instead of the expected solar Princess. Teddie had to give the speech a 6 out of 10. Not the worst monolog, but for someone's inner darkness having taken control it lacked the personal emphasis most Shadows had.

But, right before Nightmare Moon could flee after having gloated, Teddie stepped out from the barn he was hiding behind.

And then he stepped on the Alicorn.

She squeaked adorably, but other than the blow to her dignity she was unharmed. And then the fight was on, as Nightmare Moon created a huge aimless burst of magic to throw the massive paw off of her.

"Who dares to strike the Queen of the Night!"

"ME," Teddie growled out with the full force of his several ton body.

Nightmare Moon would have been said to have paled, if it weren't for the coloration of her fur to make that an impossible visual.

For the second time in this Loop, ponies fled away from Teddie. This time, in control of himself again, a familiar tarot card appeared floating in front of Teddie. Snapping his massive jaws shut on the card, it shattered like glass and he howled out **"PER-SO-NA!"**

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – parts 1 to 3
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

"A new Singularity?"

The sentence by itself was not odd. Ritsuka was pretty used to getting dragged through a bunch of random minor Singularities before solving all the main ones. However, Dr. Roman looking so… *so* was not usual. It was a mix of troubled and bewildered that Ritsuka did not like at all.

The acting director of Chaldea frowned as he proceeded to explain. "Yes. Sumaru City, Japan, towards the end of 1999 A.D. I did not even know that anything important ever happened there in the first place… I never even heard of this place before now."

Ritsuka blinked. She had never heard of any place called "Sumaru City" either. This was probably a fused loop then. Or a variant. However, she did not summon any visiting loopers… Interesting.

"What happened in this place?"

"We're not really sure. Our staff is on it… But from what we gathered, there was a serial killer on the loose, and at the same time there was a political scandal and a major earthquake that cut off the city's access to the mainland. Those are the major events we were able to find."

That was weird. A single serial killer and a corrupt politician in the modern day were not enough to alter the course of history – the fact that this happened in 1999, yet outside was technically 2018 with no changes in the baseline to speak of was proof of that.

She had to get more information.

"So it Sumaru City is an island?"

"Not at first. It was originally a port city. The earthquake was so strong that the seawater surrounded it, turning it into an island."

Mash was astonished. "Are there earthquakes really this powerful?"

Roman rubbed his head again, thinking it over. It was not his field of specialty, after all. "Well, the 2011 earthquake in Japan is said to have moved the entire country by five meters, as well as causing numerous other disasters. However, aside from Sumaru City no tectonic activity in recent years has been recorded to cause such drastic changes to the landscape. The closest I can think of is the Minoan eruption."

It was Ritsuka's term to be confused. The term was vaguely familiar, but… "Minoan?"

As usual, Mash clearly knew what Dr. Roman was referring to. "The term "Minoan eruption" refers to the eruption of the sea volcano Thera – most commonly known as the island of Santorini – that destroyed the Minoan civilization. While there are no written records of the time, it is believed that the eruption caused major changes to the morphology of the island."

"But there was no volcanic eruption in Sumaru."

"No, there wasn't. Just a very odd series of events."

Ritsuka now was troubled. "The only other singularity in the modern day was Fuyuki city, in which a Holy Grail War was completely derailed… Were there any major magic events or rituals here? That weird earthquake could have been caused by one."

"It's a possibility" agreed Dr. Roman. "Leonardo is investigating the city's history as we speak. However, there are some oddities we have picked up."

Ritsuka and Mash perked up. Dr. Roman took this as his cue to continue.

"First of all, detecting this Singularity was very difficult. Much like the Jerusalem Singularity, our instruments somehow do not function properly."

"Much like Jerusalem… Does this mean that this Singularity is trying to escape the course of Proper Human History?"

"It could. However, the situation is not exactly identical – or so the staff is telling me… Another possibility is that something is actively blocking detection, which has many troubling implications by itself. So far, the King of Mages has made no effort to stop us from detecting Singularities – our difficulties in Camelot were entirely due to the interference of the Lion King and Pharaoh Ozymandias."

"So the other possibility is that there's another extremely powerful entity in this city." Ritsuka did not like the sound of that at all.

"Fortunately, getting readings from this Singularity is much easier than it was in Camelot. Not bizarre time pockets, at the very least."

"That's good news…"

"The second point is that there is strangely high mana density in the area. Or at the very least, our readings detect something very close to it. It's not enough to destabilize our detectors any further or cause discomfort once you Rayshift, but the readings are well above average. Yet despite that, there's no recorded magus-related activity in the area. Then again, the entire orient is considered backwater by the Mages' Association, so that may explain it…"

She and Mash took careful note of this.

"So, blocked readings, high mana density. What else, Doctor?"

"The third point is related to the second, and possibly the first. There's an absurdly high number of magic signatures in the city."

"So Servants have already been summoned in this Singularity" deducted Mash.

"No… we think. Some of them *could* belong to Servants… But the striking majority of those signatures appear to be similar to those of demonic beasts."

He let that sink in.

Mash was astonished. "Demonic beasts… in the modern day!?"

"Granted, they're all pretty weak. At least those we detect. However, as their presence is most likely caused by the Singularity, their presence is to be expected. There are still hordes of Dragon Tooth Soldiers in the Fuyuki Singularity after all."

Ritsuka did not voice this, but in this loop she Awakened in her Kouhime identity. She did not think anything weird of this at first, but now that there were demonic beasts in the modern day… It could be connected.

"There's more, isn't there." It was more of a statement than a question.

"You're right about that Ritsuka. I have no good way to put this, but… we can't tell what's supposed to be wrong in this singularity."

Now Mash was confused. "What do you mean?"

"In all other Singularities, there's always something that's clearly wrong. Dragons attacking civilians in a place where there shouldn't be any. Magical poisonous mists killing people. An empire being taken over. And so on and forth. However, so far we have detected no major changes from how history should be. From what little we can see, everyone is living their normal everyday lives, no deviations to speak of."

Mash was now clearly distressed. "If everything's normal, why is Sumaru City a Singularity!?"

"We have no idea."

Roman looked at them dead in the eye. "We don't know what caused this Singularity, what is supposed to make this city so important, why it is so hard to detect, nothing. The only way we found out is if we Rayshift there."

Well, this loop was proving to be interesting already.

"Now, since this Singularity is unique, there are a few special preparations we need to take into account."

"Special preparations?"

"You are going to Rayshift to Japan in the year 1999. You cannot be seen using modern technology like smartphones or wearing armour. You'll have to get there in ordinary clothes and find some way to conceal Mash's shield. You'll look too suspicious otherwise – not to mention possessing arms is illegal. Since nothing is obviously wrong with the city yet, you can't really explain a shield."

"What if we say it's cosplay?"

Mash and Dr. Roman both stared at Ritsuka. "Cosplay?"

"Yeah. Anime and manga are all the rage. And Sumaru's pretty big, right? Port city and all. They'll know what a cosplayer is."

"That sounds perfect!"

"Senpai! Dr. Roman! I'm going to pretend to be in costume the whole time!?"

"If we want you to carry your Noble Phantasm everywhere, yes. But you should bring some casual clothes with you anyway. The other issue is finding a leyline. I mean, there's definitely one, but you can't count on running in someone like Dr. Jekyll again."

"That's true… So setting up a base will be pretty hard…"

"Third, there's the matter of the serial killer and the politician. With those elements in the city, you can expect heavy police presence. These are not desperate soldiers you'll be dealing with. Try avoiding a confrontation with the law as much as possible."

The two girls nodded as one. "Understood."

"Guess Fou will have to stay hidden too, right?" said Ritsuka, petting the strange but overly fluffy creature between the ears. Fou whined in response, followed by a displeased pout. "At least when we're in public." He cheered up a little.

"That's all for now. You can take your time with your preparations, but no more than two days. Think carefully about which servants you'll take with you."

"Will do. Mash, let's go."

"Yes, Senpai!"

…

Truth be told, for once Ritsuka had no idea who to bring along. Obviously Mash and Dantes – Mash was always coming along and Dantes was living in her mind and shadow. But besides them, at this point in the loop there were not many servants – if any at all – who was good at blending in the modern day. She had not summoned Emiya or any of the others from the Stay Night branch, which was an issue. Her being the only awake one right now was not helping matters. She had pinged when the loop started but received no response back.

She was so deep in thought that she almost did not notice when she ran into someone.

"Oh, sorry!"

"No, the fault is mine Master. Please excuse me."

She blinked. "Bedivere."

The "modest, silver knight", as the Lion King once called him. They just returned from the Camelot Singularity and Bedivere was still trying to acclimate to well… not being alive – or "alive" – anymore. Not that Ritsuka could ever blame him. He spent over fifteen hundred years hanging on to life by raw willpower just to see Artoria again. It was nowhere near as long as a looper's life, but at least Ritsuka and most other loopers had company and energy instead of being lonely half-way corpses. Seriously, fifteen hundred years… How much did he even recall from them?

Wait…

"Hey Bedivere, may I ask you something?"

He blinked in surprise before smiling warmly. "Of course. Feel free to ask me anything you want; I'll do my best to answer you."

"When you reached Avalon, what year was it for you?"

"E-Excuse me?"

…

Mash was over the moon. "Sir Bedivere! I am so glad you will be accompanying us!"

"The pleasure is all mine, Sir Kyrielight. Admittedly, I was surprised when Master asked for my aid, but I'm glad to be useful to you. I hope that once again we'll all work well together." Ah, Bedivere smiling. Always made your day.

"Bedi here is the only servant we have with experience in the modern day. So I figured he'd be the best man for the job!"

"Truly!? Well, I guess you did travel for fifteen hundred years… Considering when Camelot fell, you've spent some time in the 20th century, right."

"Indeed I have" confirmed the knight. "I was mostly in Europe at the time due to circumstances, but I do have some modern day experience. I know how to handle firearms and some basic technology at the very least. And I'm experienced in both laying low and dealing with demonic beasts. Do not worry about my arm either – truthfully, I did not have to cover it up before since I did not have it, but I was successful in hiding Excalibur. Airgetlám will be much easier to conceal."

Bedivere's expression, posture and voice were full of confidence. Despite all his self-worth issues, he was a damn good traveler and he knew it.

"The perfect man for the job!"

"Thank you for your kind words, Master. I'm looking forward to this."

Dr. Roman was rather stunned. "Wow, you guys sure seem confident… But will Bedivere be enough?"

"I also have Mash and Dantes, Doctor. And you and Da Vinci-chan will be looking out for me!"

"If you say so…"

Mash looked around. "By the way, where *is* Da Vinci? It's odd she's not here."

"Here I am! Da Vinci the wonderful genius, arriving fashionably late!"

Speak of the "devil". "What are you carrying there, Da Vinci?"

"New Mystic Codes, of course! For you, Mash, and Sir Bedivere!"

"F-For me?"

"Lady Da Vinci, you really didn't have to-"

"Oh, but I did. Like we already said, the two of you can't run around in armour all the time, can you? But you do need protection. So I prepared those Mystic Codes for you~!"

Hesitantly, the two knights opened the packages. The two codes looked like late Autumn outfits. Mash's was a grey windproof jacket over a pink turtleneck sweater and black jeans with matching boots, while Bedivere had a white leather jacket with a green dress shirt, a black vest and black jeans, again with matching boots – though those could be worn under the jeans.

"They're not too pretty I'm afraid – but they're fitting for the weather, easy to clean and fight in, and I put all sorts of enhancements on them! Shielding, healing, protection from status effects, and you can even conceal your Noble Phantasms! Airgetlám will look normal, and Mash's shield will be invisible. You better appreciate them!"

"Thank you, Lady Da Vinci" replied Bedivere with a bow.

"Thank you, Da Vinci! We'll be sure to treasure them!"

The genius looked as smug a cat eating cream. "You better do! Now, put them on! We can't have you accidently running into someone while clad in armour first thing! Oh, and Ritsuka. Here are some yen circa 1999. Around 100.000. Forging money is easy!"

…

After a few minutes, an awkward looking Mash and Bedivere emerged from separate rooms in their brand new mystic codes.

"You look good, Mash!"

She blushed. She was *adorable*. "Th-thank you Senpai."

Bedivere was shifting around a bit. "I guess I should be thankful that men's basic apparel has remained unchanged… These are quite comfortable. Shall we proceed with the Rayshift, Master?"

"Yep! Let's go!"

Singularity S

Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru A.D. 1999

The Sinner from Beyond

...

Chapter 1 part 1: Arrival
Area: ?

"NOT AGAIN!"

That was Ritsuka's reaction the moment the Rayshift happened. Because for yet another time they rayshifted in mid-air and were currently in free fall. And from what Ritsuka could see, on the bottom there was a forested mountain and no she was *not* in the mood to land on any trees.

"Mash, shield!"

"Right!"

Just in time, Mash deployed Lord Camelot. Ritsuka and Bedivere braced themselves. Arms around the head to protect it, and feet pointed at the ground to absorb the impact of their fall. Fortunately, the altitude was relatively low.

The moment of impact felt like something kicked her breath out of her. However, she was old hat at this. Without losing focus, she bent her knees and rolled. A few moments later she was up on her feet, brushing off all the leaves, twigs and dirt that managed to stick on her in those few moments. It was quite a bit. She ignored the random scrapes that she also acquired. Those would sting like hell later, but were not an immediate concern. First, roll call.

"Is everyone alright?"

"Mash Kyrielight, reporting! I am unharmed and still have all of my possessions!"

Fou chose that moment to pop up from Mash's shield. "Fou fou!"

"Bedivere reporting. I am well. Though not my first freefall I admit it's still a rather novel experience."

Inside her head, she addressed the last member of their group. *"Edmond, are you alright?"*

"Of course I am. Be careful Ritsuka. Something feels off. There's a miasma everywhere."

Miasma? *"Can you tell what it is?"*

"Not yet."

That was not good. Caution it is. "Everyone, on your guard. Edmond senses something in the area. I'm going to contact Dr. Roman."

"No need, I'm already connected." The doctor's holographic visage appeared from Mash's shield. *"Sorry for the rough landing. Looks like the same thing that's causing problems with our instruments also affected the Rayshift. I'm afraid that this call is straining the connection, so we cannot get any visual. However, we have pulled a map of the city, one before and one after the earthquake, so we should be able to help with navigation at the very least."*

"That's great" said Ritsuka. "We ended up on a forested mountain, and Edmond is sensing a dark miasma around here."

"Hmm, with the levels of mana in the air we can't get any real readings… But forested mountain you said?"

"Yes."

"There are two possibilities. One is that you're on one of the mountains surrounding the city. I have no doubt there are several paths that lead there. The other possibility is that you're in Rengedai. It's a small island in the river that crosses it Sumaru city, with the island being located right at the center. Try heading downhill – regardless of where you are you'll get in the city eventually."

"Any landmarks we should keep in mind?"

"If you're at Rengedai, you don't need to worry about that, but if you're in the surrounding areas…" There were sounds of clicking in the background.*"The only major landmarks are on Mt. Katastumuri, if you managed to land there. There is the Goketsuji shrine, the Sumaru Observatory, and the Morimoto Hospital."*

"A hospital so out of the way?"

"That's the official name… In reality, it appears to be a psych yard. That would explain the location. There's also a path and a rail system to commune between the mountain and the main city. Apparently it's a fairly popular hiking place. If you're in any of the other mountains, you're out of luck though. I can't find anything on them."

"So head downhill and hope for the best. Got it." Something fluttered in the bushes. "Thanks doctor. We'll contact you later."

"I'll try to pull up more information." He cut off the connection. Ritsuka turned to see that Bedivere had already drawn his sword, and he and Mash were already in defensive positions.

"Get ready, Ritsuka."

"Already am." "Why don't you show up?"

"Wow, you're so cool miss!"

And that's when all three of them dropped their guard in surprise.

The presences that were fluttering in the bushes were… a tiny imp in a jar, a flame ghost with a top hat and a girl whose hair was somehow wings.

"I've never seen a demon like you! Are you new?"

What.

"Demon? Who?" Demonic beast was one thing, but demon? Could they sense that she was not human? She was good at disguising that sort of thing! *Really* good!

"Of course you, silly! But you feel kinda weird… Is she like those weirdo humans who merge with us at the Cathedral…?" She only muttered the second part under her breath, but the Master and two (three) Servants heard her clearly.

Seriously, *what?* What was wrong with this place!?

Alright, information first. *"Mash, Bedivere, no attacking until we figure out what's going on. They don't seem hostile so far."*

She got affirmations from both of them, and proceeded to try and talk with the little… demons? Phantasmal Beasts? Demonic Beasts? Whatever they were.

"I'm Ritsuka. This pretty girl is Mash, and the knight is Bedivere. What are your names?"

"I'm Moh Shuvuu!" said the girl with the wing-hair.

"I'm Agathion!" said the blue imp in the jar.

"Phantom" replied the ghost with the top hat.

"Master?"

"Yeah, Bedivere?"

"Those are demons. I'm quite certain of it. We can negotiate with them. These do not seem too dangerous, but it'd be to our benefit if they remain friendly."

He knew what those things were? No matter – information first.

"Hello! You're right, it's our first time here, and we're completely lost! We are looking for Sumaru City. Can you help us?"

"Sure! You're super strong, so we have no choice!" Um, okay? They *were* demons, so that was normal… probably. Good for them, at any rate. "Go that way and you'll find a clearing with a strange offering box. There's a path near there! If you cross the river, you'll get to the city! But if you go up, you'll find the creepy place. There are lots of us there, but there's also some weirdo."

Creepy place? "What is the creepy place?"

The demon girl *sniffled*. "A big building that's all white… And all the windows have bars on them. AAAAAA IT'S TOO SCARY! Take this! We're leaving!"

The three demons shoved something in Ritsuka's hands and vanished. Ritsuka looked at it and… "She gave me *cash*!?"

"HEY, YOU!"

"What now?!"

Oh.

While they were busy talking, *another* demon had sneaked up on them. It was an angel girl in a black dress. "I'm Nightmare! And I saw what you did! You took my friend's money!"

"We didn't take it!" protested Mash.

"Don't lie to me, you meanie grownups! Blobs, with me!"

…

"Oof… That wasn't fun. I think we need to find that river."

"I agree Senpai. These demons weren't strong at all, but…"

Ritsuka, Mash and Bedivere were now head to toe covered in purple slime.

"Any tips for cleaning those, Bedi? Actually, what do you know about demons?"

The knight, who by this point had given up in trying to wipe his sword, looked thoughtful before answering. "I don't know very much I'm afraid. I only ran into these beings on rare occasions. Unlike Demonic Beasts, who live like normal animals and are edible" why did he have to add this "demons are incorporeal entities much like Servants. To my understanding, they live in a realm very much like the Throne of Heroes, and can only be brought forth by a summoner. Their presence here is very much abnormal."

"A summoner… What's their mana upkeep?"

"I'm not certain… It has been a long time, but I don't recall any summoners having more than four or five at the time. Yet this forest is absolutely filled with them."

It was true. Now that they were all paying more attention, there were several creatures hiding all over the place. Fortunately, they were not attacking so far. Their little fight with Nightmare and the Blobs had scared most of them off.

"Alright. River first. We clean up, and try to get dry before we get a chill."

"Master, Servants don't get chill."

"Well, I do. We'll figure out what to do from there."

"Understood!"

…

Chapter 1 section 2: Arrival
Area: Mount Katatsumuri

"Let me get this straight…" started Dr. Roman, who somehow was still not used to these situations *"a group of tiny beings called demons approached you, gave you information, got*

scared and gave you money, and another group of demons attacked you for keeping that money."

"Pretty much."

After a fair bit of walking to the direction that Moh Shuvuu pointed at, Ritsuka, Mash and Bedivere found the clearing with the odd donation box. It was from a shrine dedicated to someone named "Junosuke Kuroda", who Ritsuka had never heard of before. Finding the path after that was easy, and following the sound of running water led them to the river, which conveniently had a well-maintained wooden bridge crossing it.

Bedivere had started a small fire – probably illegally – and the three of them were now stripped to their basics soaking wet from the dive in the river, while they left their clothes near the heat to dry them faster. Bedivere was very politely not looking at them.

"And that's how you ended up covered in slime. Well we cannot hope to understand the mindset of demons… But you said that they gave you information."

"Yes. Moh Shuvuu mentioned a large white building with barred windows in the area."

"Going by the description, this must be Morimoto Hospital, which means that you are on Mt. Katatsumuri. She mentioned something weird about the place?"

"Affirmative" said Mash. "She mentioned that there are lots of demons in the area, as well as somebody weird."

"Hmm… Seeing that we don't have any other leads right now, I say you visit the psych yard first. If there are indeed many demons there, there may be some clues about the Singularity. The mysterious person may hold more information. They may be hostile, but we have nothing to lose from contacting them."

"So first we dry up, then head to the psych yard. Got it."

"...When you phrase it like that Ritsuka, it sounds like a horrible idea…"

In her head, Edmond snorted. *"It sounds like a horrible idea even when you DON'T phrase it like that."*

"While we're on our way there, can you find anything about the hospital?"

"...We already have."

She did not like that tone. "What happened?"

"A gas leak, according to a few newspaper articles… It burned the hospital down to the ground."

"Typical cover up excuse" said Edmond in her head. *"Remember the corrupt politician he mentioned?"*

She really hoped he was wrong about this.

"We'll have to check out for ourselves. Mash, Bedivere."

The two of them were already watching in rapt attention – Bedivere full of suspicion, and Mash full of alarm.

"You heard him. We dry up and get going. For all we know, the hospital may be already burned to the ground. We don't have time to waste."

...

The rest of the trip was quiet. Most demons still did not dare to attack them after the display from before, which left the battles to a minimum. A good thing, considering they needed to conserve their energy. Occasionally, Fou would growl to the more rowdy ones – even if his specialty was killing primates, the Fourth Beast of Humanity was not to be taken lightly regardless of context.

If only they ever saw him making himself comfy on Mash' bossom, maybe their opinion would change drastically.

Ahem.

Anyway, now that they were climbing up the mountain another problem occurred to her; how would they even find that person. There was no guarantee that that person was there right now. And if the psych yard was somehow properly running, they would not let in visitors without a good reason. Fou could wrap them anywhere they wanted in the hospital, but they still had no idea who this person was or how they looked like. Being "creepy" by demon child standards was not much of a description.

Then again, that may be all they need.

"Doctor Roman?"

A few moments later, the holographic screen came to light. *"Yes Ritsuka?"*

"Once we get to the hospital, can you scan it for strong magical signatures? If a demon finds someone creepy, they're sure to be using magic of some sort."

"I see" said Bedivere. "Since we don't know their description, we'll have to use alternative means."

"I'm on it" said Roman. *"Though the results may be a little delayed. With that interference, we cannot scan and talk to you at the same time."*

"Understood. I'll call again once I'm in the hospital. Bye."

Click.

Click.

"SENPAI, WATCH OUT!"

CLANG

She ducked and something cracked and suddenly there was a flash of a blade that she barely avoided.

"Ambuse!"

"你们到底是什么人？"

"Master, we're surrounded! Our enemies look human! I'm not detecting any signatures!"

Bedivere growled. "So they're mere lowlifes!"

They were surrounded. Harsh men with oriental features, most of them with scars, some with casual clothes, some with suits, and a few with traditional Chinese clothing, holding anything from guns to bats to falcions and knives. And they had just shouted in Chinese.

In an incredulous part of her mind that was *not* in full alert, she realized that they had just been surrounded by the *Triads.* In *Japan.*

What the actual FUCK is wrong with this place.

She adopted a martial arts stance, ready to draw a weapon from her pocket at any second. "Mash, Be-Lucius! Back of the blade! Fou, keep the critters out!"

"Understood!"

As if that was a signal for everyone, the criminals rushed in screaming. Ritsuka avoided a bullet by sheer dumb luck before she had to duck under an incoming sword swing. Someone else kicked her in her gut and tossed her back a bit, but she held her ground. The corner of her eye caught a flash, and she elbowed the man from behind her, before she grabbed him and tossed him to the others. Predictably, Mash and Bedivere had already defeated their own opponents.

"Now!"

At her order, the two knights tackled the criminals to the ground, eliciting a pained groan and the sound of something *give*. Ritsuka did not feel sorry for them at all.

"Three out of ten" said Edmond.

"Who are you grading?"

She did not wait for an answer. Instead she stepped on the last man still conscious.

"Alright, fess up. What are you doing here."

To emphasize her point, Bedivere edged his blade close to his throat. The mook just glared at them.

"Do you speak Japanese?"

He spat on her.

Ritsuka reached her Pocket for an antiseptic wipe and cleaned her face.

Right. Forget the language barrier. They would not get anything out of this guy.

"What should we do, Master?" asked Mash.

"They'll report back" said Edmond. *"I don't know to whom, but it'll be bad for us. There must be here for a mission."*

"Wanna bet it's about that "weirdo in the hospital"?"

"That's not a bet."

She dropped the wipe on the man's face. Predictably, he started cursing at her.

"Lucius" she said again, switching to his old moniker. Safer that way. The two servants seemed to catch on her drift because they did not question her choice. "Can you wipe memories?"

"Of course."

He leaned down over the man who seemed to realize that something very wrong was about to happen.

"I know why we're not killing them, but are you sure about hiding them in the bushes? There are still demons hidden here."

"No other choice. If we leave them on the path somebody WILL notice – probably other Triad guys."

"Heh. So you're putting the blame for the beatings on the demons." She knew that. She did not have to like it.

"Lucius, are you done?"

"Almost."

"Please hurry. We don't have much time."

Chapter End Notes

This is the start of my Persona 2 and Fate/Grand Order fused loop. While I'm proud of the collection, it's going to dominate the next few chapters so I won't take it personally if you grow sick of it. Still, there are a couple of snips independent from the collection so keep that in mind as you scroll through!

Miscellaneous 22

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – part 4
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

Chapter 1 part 3: Arrival
Area: Morimoto Hospital

Tall white walls, and barred windows. Exactly as Moh Shuvuu described the place. Morimoto Hospital – or rather, Morimoto *Sanitarium* as it should be called – was every bit as cold as the name implied. Security cameras surrounded the perimeter, and whoever had installed them did not even attempt to be subtle about their presence. There was also no attempt to make the exterior look nice or decent. This was not a place to heal people from whatever may ail their minds. It was a prison.

Ritsuka signaled her two companions to hide behind the bushes. None of them could afford to be seen by the cameras.

"Dr. Roman. Can you get any readings from the inside?"

A few seconds later, the call connected. *"Give me a few moments…"* A few moments turned into half a minute. Then one. Then three and then five. They were now getting nervous. Normally, Dr. Roman NEVER took that long. *"No good. We can only get generic signals that indicate the presence of demons. The readings from the hospital itself are too… uniform. Leonardo thinks that something may be masking it."*

Of course. "Got it. Thanks, Doctor." She turned off the connection.

"Edmond. Go check it out. If it's masked then there's definitely something suspicious in there."

Without any verbal acknowledgment, her shadow twisted before the dark Avenger emerged, only to vanish a second later and walk through the front doors.

Now they wait.

"Place is still working" came in the report. *"Not many people but there are a few nurses around and a lady at the reception desk. I think I feel some magical energy. It's weird, it sort of feels like a bounded field. I'll go check it out."*

"Roger that."

A Bounded Field in the middle of the psych yard. That could not possibly be a good sign. At least it would explain why Dr. Roman could not get any readings from this place.

Did a magus manage to set up a workshop in the middle of all this? Mash did not report the presence of any laylines here…

"Ritsuka." Edmond's voice was grave even by his standards. *"You have to see this."*

…

Sneaking in the building was a bit tricky. Bedivere could just slip into spirit form, but she and Mash had to hide under Robin Hood's borrowed "No Face, May King" Noble Phantasm which AND open the front door without the receptionist noticing. However they managed with only a light startle from her. She did not even try to investigate. Then again, they were in a psych yard in the middle of the forest, so perhaps she was used to weird noises?

The interior was as depressing as the exterior. Pure white walls, ceiling lights that looked exactly like every office building ever, security cameras everywhere and even some barred doors that blocked a few hallways. The few sad-looking decorative plants shoved in the corners and the occasional vending machines for the visitors did not help in the slightest.

Between the unexpectedly large size of the building and the barred hallways, it took them a bit maneuvering to get to where Edmond was. From the outside, Room 303 looked exactly like all the others. A steel door with an opening on top sealed with obscuring glass. Under the sign there was a second one that wrote "Tatsuya Sudou." Yet despite its otherwise unassuming appearance, Ritsuka could feel the Bounded field inside. Sort of.

"I unlocked the door. Brace yourselves so they don't hear us."

Okay?

"What about the security camera?"

"Took care of it. Still, better stay in Spirit Mode."

Ritsuka relayed the warning to the others, and as quietly as she could, she opened the door.

Oh.

Oh.

Shit.

Now she knew why the demons called him creepy.

Inside the jail cell, all the walls were covered in poetry. A single poem scribbled with what looked like coal and maybe *blood* written over and over and over and over again, on the walls on the floor on the ceiling, *everywhere*. And in the two parts that were not covered in the poem, there were other, stranger things. A huge black eye. A butterfly that looked like a vortex. And newspaper cutouts. *Countless* newspaper cutouts.

How in the world did they NOT notice this!?

Slowly they all walked in and closed the door behind them. Ritsuka opted to keep the communications mental.

"What the hell?"

Mash was shivering. *"Is this what kind of people get admitted to these hospitals?"*

"It looks exactly like the ramblings of all those who went mad at Chateau d'If. On the surface."

"On the surface?"

"Look more closely at those newspapers."

Bedivere was already there, reading. *"All of them are articles reporting murders committed by a serial killer known as the JOKER."*

"So in other words…"

"Those are trophies."

Ritsuka stared at the wall for a long time. The victims were all from their early teens at the youngest, but other than that they had nothing in common. Old. Young. Middle aged. Schoolchildren. Men. Women. Business owners. Salary people. Jobless people. Retired folks. There was absolutely no connection between the victims. Nothing but the absolute brutality recorded so dispassionately by the newspapers, with their guts ripped open and their limbs torn apart as if assaulted by savage beasts. And each and every time, the police "has found no evidence".

It was sickening.

Mash could only stare in morbid fascination.

"S-Sempai… Here it says that a CEO was killed in his office during work hours… The secretary found him with his… his…"

"Yeah. I read that."

"That's not our biggest problem."

Everyone turned to Edmond. *"What do you mean?"*

"How does this guy even leave his cell? There are no signs of entering and breaking on the door, and no ways to remove the window. The air vents are not large enough to fit a person. We are not on the ground floor so he couldn't have dug a hole."

Ritsuka could see where he was going with this. *"So either he has obtained a key, or he can somehow teleport."*

Ritsuka really hoped it was just a key, because she had chased after enemies significantly faster than her more times than she could count. Trying to capture somebody who could teleport would be an exercise in futility.

"The poem is mysterious too…"

Ritsuka leaned in to read it.

Oracle of Maia?

They all leaned in to read it.

The seven Pleiades set the frozen time free
Wild dance, shadow festival, foreign song ensue
As flames of expiation light the heavens
The lion's roar echoes far and wide
Five skulls glow in the depths of the earth
The holy cross shines high up in the sky
Once the star comes to a complete halt
The Maia Maiden's heart stops with it
What then remains is paradise on earth
Marking the end and a new beginning

"He's nuts…"

"Nope. I'm the only sane guy around."

It was from *right behind them.*

Ritsuka almost got whiplash from turning around so fast. *How did he get here!?* She had not heard the door open or anything!

"That little poem there? That's how the world SHOULD be."

"What?"

The man looked like he walked out of a slasher movie. He was a tall albino, dressed on a hospital gown and a black coat thrown on his shoulders like a cape, holding a blackened katana. The mane he called "hair" was an absolute mess, and he was dirty like he had not showered in months. His breath smelled faintly of alcohol.

"Hehehe… You know, the Voices tell me you should die. Shame we can't pick a fight here."

"What do you-"

"Quiet now. I'm ain't yelling, am I? We don't wanna the nurse chicks know we're here. Gotta wonder though, why'd you break in my room? Got a lot of bastards who want my head but you guys ain't on that list."

This had to be Tatsuya Sudou. There's no way it could be someone else. And was actually starting a *quiet conversation* with them. Ritsuka was astonished.

However, this was still a serial killer. A madman. He was in an asylum. He was covered in blood, and was maybe a bit drunk too. Even with three servants at her side and herself not being a pushover, toying around a bomb was not wise.

"Here's the deal – I'll answer your question and we'll not kill you now. In return, you're going to answer some of *our* questions. Understood?"

Sudou seemed to stare at the void for a few moments before nodding. "Sure. You start. Why are ya here?"

"A demon at the forest told us that there's a "strange man" here and strong demon presence, so we had to investigate. No, we can't tell you why we're investigating."

The man stared at her like she had grown a second head. It was getting uncomfortable.

"You're weird. And the Voices are laughing…"

Ritsuka decided NOT to ask what those "voices" were.

"Our turn. First, why are you killing people?"

"Wha, have ya been living under a rock? Never heard the rumours?"

"We're new in town."

"Yeah, that figures… It's a job, a job. Never thought I'd pitch my services, but here it goes. You got a cell phone, right? If ya call your own number in it, it should say the line's busy and nobody will pick up. But now, if ya do that *I'll* pick up. Then ya tell me who to kill, and I do it. Free, fast, and you ain't got to give me your name either. Pretty sure no company's gonna charge you for the call either, never checked that. Heh, how was my pitch?"

"And his "payment"..." added Edmond *"is the sick pleasure he gets from killing. Truly a disgusting being."*

"Not very professional but gets the point across. Now, the second question. What's with the Triad goons?"

Sudou scowled. "Tch. My old man wants to off me… Looks locking me up ain't good enough for him anymore…"

So a father who really wanted him dead and had enough money to buy the services of the Triads *in Japan*.

"Last question. What does the poem mean."

"Just told ya. It's how the world *should* be. Shit went down, prophecy was fulfilled, finally got paradise, and then those brats went and reversed the whole thing. Sorta. Messed up on a

few details. Equivalent exchange followed. You know, you get something, something equal gets lost. Ya eat 'till you're stuffed, throw the rest, and then some poor bastard elsewhere goes hungry. That's how it worked here too. Karma's building up for them. Eh, probably for me too, hehe. I ain't a saint."

It was pretty obvious that Sudou was not willing to divulge any more details. Which was a shame because Ritsuka had no idea what he was talking about.

"That's all I wanted. I'll be leaving out."

"Heh. *I* ain't satisfied."

Ritsuka did not like the sound of that. "What do you want."

"Just a small favour, it'll help us both. Those Triad guys over there? They ain't much, but they're a pain in the ass and my old man pays them some good cash. If ya clean them up it'll be nice. Hell, you'll do the whole city a favour. Heard they've been hanging around in Yumezaki. Dunno where their base is though."

That was… unexpectedly helpful. And as much as he hated to admit it, taking out the Triads *did* sound like something they would have to do. "Deal."

"Heh. Nice to have business with ya. Now get outta here before the nurses make their rounds."

Sudou looked all too smug while he was saying that, laying on the bed like it was the most luxurious sofa ever with a shit-eating grin.

Ritsuka did not bother to say goodbye. She just slipped under May King again and left.

[Nocturne], [Fate/Grand Order]
Friend and Fiend
Author: Vaati Star aka Anata_Suruu

Naoki was not exactly in the best of moods at the moment. Namely because this Loop appeared to be a damn Null Loop… for the most part. He'd already Awakened post Conception, so he was in the morgue. The Demi-Fiend groaned, grumbling to himself about how he'd have to start from scratch this Loop, dammit.

Much to his surprise however, as he was running around the Hospital, a much stronger than normal demon stalked the hospital.

Naoki stopped in his tracks when what appeared to be a Nekomata, but not a normal looking one, walked into the hallways. For one, this one was probably male, which was already odd, possessing a tail that split halfway down. The black haired demon had it's ears on top of it's head rather than at the sides, nor did it possess that half-cat mask other Nekomata did. Of course it still had a body mostly covered in white fur and what was probably a black leotard, nor did it look very masculine despite being male.

The Nekomata actually did turn towards him as he put up his dukes. He wasn't certain if this one was going to be as strong as the Ginza demons, but something that powerful this early on was going to be a problem… he could handle it though, just had to- "Hey there."

Naoki paused for a moment as the demon waved to him, a very human gesture. Of course now that he was looking them in the face, he saw the demon's eyes were blue. Slowly he began to lower his hands. "Hey," Naoki responded, already connecting the dots. This was a Looper, had to be, the appearance was far too distinct, but he had to ask anyway. "You're not from around here?"

The Nekomata shrugged. "Not exactly," the demon walked towards a window, looking outside. With little else to do, Naoki joined them at the window. "...huh, world's in better condition than usual."

That gave Naoki pause. "Hang on, you're saying this is better than usual for you?"

"I mean the two options tend to be 'everything is on fire' and 'bleached white'. At least there is actually something out there," the demon admitted, before turning to Naoki. "Ritsuka Fujimaru," he said, offering his hand to Naoki.

The demi-fiend looked at it for several moments. This was a… far more pleasant meeting than he usually got from a Looper. He reached out, shaking their fellow Looper's clawed hand. "Naoki Kashima. Welcome to hell."

The two stood there for several moments before breaking off the handshake. "Bit surprised," Naoki muttered, putting his hands on his hips. "Most folks don't end up Demons here," the Demi-Fiend commented.

"Woke up like this, but that's nothing new," Ritsuka admitted, before looking at Naoki again. "I've heard a bit about you."

"Joy," Naoki thought bitterly. "And let me guess," Naoki started, crossing his arms, already expecting the negative answer.

"I don't care what they've said, or what you've done in the past." Naoki leaned forward a bit, eyebrows raised as Ritsuka continued. "I give everyone a chance. Besides, I've heard your story." Ritsuka put his hands on his hips, looking down at himself and then back at Naoki. "We have a lot more in common than you might think."

Naoki straightened himself, before motioning Ritsuka to follow him. "Walk and talk," he ordered, his fellow Looper falling in line. "How so?"

"World gets destroyed? Recruit basically an army of mythological heroes and deities to do battle against forces seeking to reshape the world to their whim? I'd go into more detail, but the less depression for us both the better," Ritsuka offered, much to Naoki's bemusement.

"I'll be the judge of that. So what do you plan on doing?" the Demi-fiend questioned as they walked together, heading to go find Pixie.

"...Mind if I stick with you then. I mean, mostly a Null Loop it seems, and I don't have an idea what's really going on," Ritsuka admitted.

Naoki smirked. Having a Nekomata, even if it was another Looper… actually especially if it was another Looper, and a non-hostile one at that was good by him. "Sure. And by the way," he pointed behind them. "Said this before, but welcome to hell, Amala."

Ritsuka chuckled, tail waving behind him. "Been there, done that, and got the t-shirt. In Baseline."

…

Actually working alongside Ritsuka, and after grabbing Pixie, they made to escape the hospital. Forneus was… well, he got destroyed. Having a second tactical eye was pretty helpful, all things considered. It did turn out Ritsuka was a bit higher leveled than he was, but not nearly as strong as a Ginza Nekomata.

Being unique had its advantages, and disadvantages, he knew that quite well. At least the extra healing was useful.

"So, your world ends up destroyed every Loop too?" Naoki questioned, sitting on a bench in the middle of Yoyogi Park. He'd convinced Pixie to come along with them, of course.

Ritsuka nodded, putting his hands behind his head as he shared the bench with his fellow Anchor. "Twice actually. We managed to fix it the first time. Still trying to do it a second time. We're… hopeful about it," Ritsuka offered before looking down. "Course we're basically running on 'hope defeating everything will fix the problem'. Everyone kinda died so…"

"Not exactly an easily fixable situation, the end of the world," Naoki mused, something he, and this far younger Anchor knew far too well. Naoki took a deep breath. "You feel like you're always trying to make the best of nothing but bad options?"

"All the darn time," Ritsuka admitted. "At least when it comes to the big picture."

"At least you have hope for a brighter tomorrow," Naoki remarked bitterly as he leaned forward. "Things didn't exactly get better until pretty recently, as far as the Loops are concerned."

The two sat there for just a bit longer, before Ritsuka looked to Naoki. "How about, when you visit me, we'll do something a bit more fun. World's probably going to end anyway, doesn't mean can't make it just a little bit brighter," Ritsuka offered, standing up and offering his hand to Naoki again.

The Demi-fiend grasped Ritsuka's hand, pulling himself up using the demon as leverage. "We'll see about that by the end of this. We did only just meet," the other Anchor pointed out.

Ritsuka shrugged as they began walking again. "Let's see just how far we get with that. Apparently we can't make a 'Reason', which is pretty stupid."

"Is how it is, least this Loop," Naoki snarked. "Come on, Shibuya awaits."

…

"Huh," Ritsuka muttered as he and Naoki stood before the Cathedral of Shadows, having just witnessed the first fusion. "And they just let you do this?"

"Yep, makes them stronger, and since I'm in charge, I choose who to fuse," Naoki admitted. "I take it that's not how it works in your place?"

"...Sometimes, it's weird, but they don't inherit each others powers. I find it rather disturbing to even sacrifice Servants to other Servants, so I tend to just keep all of them around whenever we end up with one of those variants," Ritsuka admitted.

"Colorful crowd you must keep then," Naoki snarked, uncrossing his arms before moving around. "You two, you're next," Naoki ordered, a 'spare' Pixie and an Angel floating into the Cathedral, leaving Ritsuka to look at Naoki a bit. "You're wondering about the one we met in the hospital."

"A bit yes," Ritsuka admitted, leaving Naoki to huff.

"Well just like how you don't like sacrificing Servants, I don't sacrifice my actual friends. Granted, I don't have a lot of those here," the Demi-fiend admitted, before suddenly alarms started blaring. "Oh not now," Naoki groaned.

"What's going on!?" The Nekomata bared his claws, wiping around rapidly as the dark orb far above them started sputtering. And with a massive explosion the Cathedral shook.

Both Naoki and Ritsuka looked towards the new demon. "Mmmm? It seems an unexpected demon was born," stated the Minister of the Cathedral. Naoki was staring, in actual shock as Ritsuka looked confused.

"Uh… Naoki, who's that?" Ritsuka questioned, pointing at the newborn demon as Naoki just began… laughing.

The flying, fiery bird was looking down at them both. "Suzaku! Heed me, will you!" The Demi-Fiend ordered. The bird nodded and joined them, leading to Naoki's wicked grin to only widen.

"...You're not going to sacrifice me for Fusion are you?" Ritsuka asked, after Naoki had calmed down a bit from his insane laughter.

"Not even going to try it. Besides, you seem to be a fairly unique Demon anyway. I want to see what you're capable of," Naoki admitted. "Honestly, we're pretty much along for the ride at this point. I already know how I want this Loop to go."

"And you're not telling me that, are you?" Ritsuka asked, his tails swishing back and forth as Naoki smirked.

"Nope."

…

They ended up having to backtrack and pick up another Pixie and Angel, despite the addition of Suzaku, since Naoki had specifically wanted Ame-no-Uzume for their upcoming battle in the Labyrinth of Amala.

Said battle being against Matador, which Naoki, Ritsuka, Ame-no-Uzume and Pixie were now facing. Which was going extremely well with Naoki's preparations, and the fact both Ritsuka and the newly fused demon were capable of absorbing it's 'Force' attacks. Something they quickly used to pound the Fiend into the floor.

"Always cathartic that one," Naoki mused as the pair and their party of Demons continued through the ruined world.

Ritsuka rolled his eyes, tails still swishing behind him before remarking "You seemed to have a lot of pent up rage towards him."

"Matador's a bit of a bastard at times," Naoki admitted, watching as Ritsuka idly flexed his claws."You seem pretty used to claws for someone who's not supposed to be up front."

"The Loops like to find ways to drag me into fighting personally quite a bit," Ritsuka admitted. "Originally it did bother me, but now? Now I'm happy I can fight alongside my friends."

Naoki scoffed at that one, but didn't outright dismiss it. The pair were silent for several moments… at least until the next group of demons jumped them, and were subsequently pummeled into oblivion.

Good stress relief.

…

"Well that was interesting," Ritsuka muttered, looking over his new outfit much to Naoki's amusement. After beating up the latest group of demons, Ritsuka had finally 'awakened' into his newest form.

Further going along with the surprises, the Nekomata had turned into a Senri, but the appearance of course was different from the norm. A wide brimmed blue hat like a lamp shade hid cat-like ears beneath, and long flowing black hair trailed down Ritsuka's back. He had much more formal robes now, in blue and white, but he hadn't lost those cat-like features. If anything they'd gotten a bit more catty.

"Seems that training you said you did over your Loops has paid off," Naoki jested as Ritsuka chuckled, bouncing up and down on digitigrade paws. Their singular tail that split midway had become two that poked out from beneath their robe. And of course, their hands were still black fured, with sharp claws ready to rend flesh at any moment.

"Yeah, helps when I can't change stances as needed." Ritsuka stopped bouncing, pulling off his hat. "Strangest part was the fact it gave me a hat," Naoki's fellow Anchor mused.

Naoki just crossed his arms, and pointed behind him. "Come on, we've still got more to do," the demi-fiend grumped. Ritsuka spun the hat, putting it back on his head and followed after Naoki. The pair and their party of demons heading further into Tokyo.

...

"I don't like any of these 'Reasons'," Ritsuka complained after mulling over them all. Naoki raised an eyebrow, prompting Ritsuka to explain a bit more. "Surprisingly, I've seen the results of Yosuga, an application of Shijima in a way, and my own standards lead me to reject Musubi," Ritsuka explained.

Naoki raised his fingers. "Lostbelt Russia, Lostbelt China and I take it you're referring to Instrumentality?" Naoki guessed, based on the various stories the pair had shared between each other, this Loop.

"Pretty close yeah," the demon on the ground admitted, before spinning and getting to his feet. "So I say it on hopefully decent authority that these all suck," Ritsuka offered.

Naoki nodded. "Yeah, I don't tend towards them either." Naoki admitted. "But on the topic of Reasons, that Kirschtaria guy, he sounds like he'd be capable of making one."

"He practically had one, and was making it happen in my Baseline." Ritsuka took off his hat, scratching behind an ear. "The idea to raise all of humanity as individual deities, and the hope that they would come to peace with their newfound understanding. His 'God-Shattering Plan'."

"Sounds like he and Lucifer would get along," Naoki snarked as the pair began walking and talking again. "I wouldn't call such a path Chaotic or Lawful myself. But this place tends towards either strict Law or strict Chaos. Good and Evil have no real meaning."

Several moments, and one fight with a Fiend later, Ritsuka asked yet another new question. "I've often had to stop and ask myself if what I'm doing is right or wrong. And I don't have an answer to that yet…"

Naoki scoffed. "Right or wrong, good or evil. One could say history decides who is right… but in truth it's simple. I came to that conclusion a long, long time ago. There isn't a 'right' or a 'wrong'. And Good and Evil are subjective labels. So I suggest you stop fretting over what 'is' and instead focus on what you yourself believe to be right and wrong." Naoki raised a hand before clenching it into a fist. "In your world, you're undergoing a Conception of your own. Your path is Freedom, to return it to the way it once was. A future undefined. Your own story. Eight Reasons, Eight paths. You're just cutting your way through them all. After all, you said it yourself. Even the strongest of those other Reasons yielded to you and yours," he nodded to Ritsuka. "Only the two unknown Reasons stand in your way of Freedom."

"Thanks for the speech," Ritsuka chuckled, holding out his hand, Naoki grasping it. The two shook before looking towards the building ahead of them. Whatever awaited them, they'd meet it head on… and smash it into the ground.

...

"I seriously question how we're fighting gods like this," Ritsuka pointed out after having just blasted Skadi with a Agidyne spell, finishing off the demon.

"I just sort of rolled with it. Most deities tend to not be as tough as advertised here, they're just demons. Powerful, and often annoying demons, but still just demons," Naoki offered, gathering the spoils of their battle as Ritsuka tipped the rim of his hat downward, tails swishing behind him with dull blue flames petering out.

"For us it depends on what level the deity's on. A Servant? Little trouble most of the time. An actual Divine Spirit tends to be an extreme problem. And then we have Living Gods, who are stupidly hard to actually harm, let alone put down."

"Well you did it in Baseline, you'll find a way to do it yourself eventually," Naoki pointed out, tossing Ritsuka some Macca. "I kinda wanna punch Mecha-Zeus in the face now that I know about him."

"You'll get first dibs in Olympus then," Ritsuka joked, leaving Naoki to chuckle, only slightly.

"Looking forward to it."

…

"Who the hell was that?" Ritsuka questioned after he and Naoki had just avoided getting shot, or stabbed, by their latest and most persistent pursuer.

"Dante…" Naoki muttered, clicking his tongue. "Unawake, sadly. It's generally a coin toss if he or Raidou is here," the Demi-fiend looked at Ritsuka.

They'd been making their way through the Labyrinth of Amala in their spare time. Something they happened to have quite a bit of. Only now they'd reached the third Kapla, and thus Dante had begun pursuing them. "You've been keeping on your skills yeah?"

"Nowhere near as diverse as yours, but I have," Ritsuka stood up, bouncing from one foot to the other and rubbing his leg beneath his robe. He'd taken a grazing shot from the demon hunter.

"You're still packing Heat Riser right?" Naoki questioned. It had been a bit of a surprise when Ritsuka had pulled out that move, since, normally, that wasn't a spell demons used in his section of the Amalaverse.

"That, Radiance, Mediarahan, my claws-" Ritsuka started listing.

"Didn't need the full list, just good to know you still have that. Don't forget it," Naoki ordered, clicking his tongue. "Alright, here's how we're gonna deal with him. I hope your MP pool is full."

"I've got a rather massive one. You're the one who deals mostly physical." Ritsuka pointed out, casually lighting his twin tails with pale blue flames.

"And you do magic, now let's go over this plan quickly," Naoki started, rechecking their current stock as they hashed out a battle plan.

Having a second, and rather good tactician was quite helpful for that. Not that it made fighting Dante any less of a struggle.

…

"So, here's where we make the decision," Naoki started, the pair standing outside a massive tower. "Either we go up there and go for Freedom, or we head back to Amala and go to punch God in the face." Naoki offered.

"As much as I want to punch god in the face…" Ritsuka started. "I care more about giving people their lives back than doing that."

Naoki huffed, but nodded. "Doesn't really matter to me, I've done everything countless times." the Demi-Fiend pointed at Ritsuka. "I'll add either way we do that, we're defying them," Naoki raised his hands and made air quotes. "Great Will, ugh…"

"I take it you hate it," Ritsuka commented.

"It can fuck off for all I care, it's pretty much your Gaia on a larger scale," Naoki complained. The 'adventure' as it were had been a fairly dark one all things considered. But just having someone to talk to regularly, debate with and otherwise not go completely insane was better than being alone.

"...Well what do you want to do?" Ritsuka asked, prompting Naoki to lower his arms.

"Pal, you are the only person who ever asks what *I* want to do here," the Demi-Fiend complained. He sighed, turning around. "That's the fucking glorious thing about this place. Demons don't get choices, and what do you know, we're demons," Naoki looked up at the tower.

"You seem perfectly capable of making a choice now. After all, we made the choice not to take up their stupid Reasons, so like you said, that leaves us two choices." Ritsuka moved to stand beside Naoki, looking up the tower.

Naoki was silent for several moments, before chuckling. "Fine, we're searching for Freedom. Let's go."

"Right alongside you," Ritsuka put his hand on Naoki's shoulder, the Demi-fiend slowly removing his ally's hand from said shoulder… before frowning.

"You know, I never figured out what happens to all the demons post Freedom…" he muttered looking at Ritsuka.

"Well I'll tell you next time we meet," Ritsuka offered, Naoki nodding.

"Well, at least you know what you're getting into," Naoki walked forward, Ritsuka following him into the Tower of Kagutsuchi.

…

"Well that felt familiar," Ritsuka complained after he and Naoki had finally beaten down Ahriman. "Banning attacks, items, healing. Ugh…"

"Be glad we're diverse and I know how to exploit this," Naoki commented, before frowning. "Wait, familiar?"

"We have these events we like to call festivals. Nerofest and Gilfest. Featuring extreme challenges. One of those was pretty similar to this, but also exploitable in a different way."

"Might have to try those myself," Naoki mused. "No fate of the world?"

"Just the fate of your wallet and sleep schedule," Ritsuka snarked as they continued onward.

"I've got more than enough Macca, and don't care to sleep," he responded. "Only Noah, Thor, and Baal left, then we beat the crap out of Kagutsuchi and force it to remake the old world. He's gonna start pouting about law and cycles and justice and shit, but don't listen to it."

"Yeah, sounds like a deity alright. Let's get to work… I'm putting Baal down for what she did to the Manikins," Ritsuka growled, prompting a snort from Naoki.

"Better reason than I had. Let's go."

…

Facing down Kaguutsuchi had been difficult. Very difficult. Something Naoki had been working towards all Loop (obviously), but now that it had been bested, it was time to bring back the world that once was.

The world Ritsuka hadn't even seen, and Naoki knew would be exceptionally short lived.

So they got their goodbyes out of the way fairly quickly.

"See you soon, Naoki." Ritsuka shook the Demi-fiend's hand.

"Same to you," Naoki responded, the pair awaiting the world's remaking, which would happen in mere moments.

A pair of souls who, at least on some level, could relate to the other's struggle, parted. At the very least, one was certain they'd gained a new friend. And the other, a new ally to call upon.

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – parts 5 and 6
Author: me

Chapter 2 section 1: Hardcore Entertainment
Area: Morimoto Sanitarium

Once they were back in the safety of privacy, away from the security cameras and hopefully the perception of Sudou, whatever its range may be.

"*What do we do?"*

Edmond's question was valid. He surely had opinions on his own. Opinions that were most definitely along the lines of "kill that man now". Bedivere undoubtedly had similar opinions

And probably so did Mash. Ritsuka definitely had killing Sudou in her schedule. If the newspapers in the "cell" – could you really call it that if the one living in it could leave at anytime? – were any indication, his "services" were absurdly popular. The more he was left alive, the more people would die.

Actually, now that she thought about it…

"Something wrong, Senpai?"

"Isn't he a bit *too* popular?"

Mash blinked. "…huh?"

Edmond chose to manifest from the shadows, a thoughtful frown in his face. "Ritsuka is right… Even if with Sudou's system you can shift the blame, it makes no sense that there are this many murders."

Ritsuka nodded. "Not to mention, Sudou's lead sounds pretty damn weird. He heard rumours about the Triads gathering in a particular part of the city? From *where*?"

"Uh… He said it was called Yumezaki, right? Maybe we can call the doctor to tell us where that is?"

"I'd rather get off this mountain first. Too many demons here for comfort. Then once we're down, we ask some locals where is Yumezaki. Maybe we'll learn more about those rumours too."

"Understood."

…

"*Sorry, but… Can you say that again!? The Triads are hired by the father of the serial killer to kill him? And they have a base in the middle of the city? Oh, and the serial killer takes orders by some weird glitch in the cell phones or something!?*"

"Not to mention the prophecy thing… I have absolutely no clue what THAT'S about."

Once they were close enough to the base of the mountain – that was a bit of a trek – Ritsuka called Doctor Roman to update him on the situation. His reaction was pretty predictable, to be honest, but Ritsuka did not want to worry him by not telling him what was happening. Besides, he always had a strange kind of insight in such situations, once he got over his panic and denial at the most absurd bits. He was not once known as the wise king for nothing.

"*Right… Well, the good news is that this information establishes an initial link between the various strange points we found about this city. You have confirmed that the serial killer's name is Tatsuya Sudou, correct?*"

He politely waited for their nods before continuing. "*While we cannot find any solid connection, it is extremely likely that he is the son of Tatsuzou Sudou.*"

The names definitely checked out, but… "So… He sounds important, but…"

"*Tatsuzou Sudou was the Foreign Minister of Japan during this time period, and he was one of the people involved in the political scandal we talked about.*"

"…Yeah, figures… A guy like that could definitely hire the Triads in Japan… Seriously, why not the Yakuza?"

Seriously. Just. What even *was* this.

"*In addition, during this particular time period he is running for Prime Minister.*"

Of course he did.

"No wonder he's trying to get his son out of the way" said Edmond. "If the story that his son is responsible behind the recent murders came out, it would absolutely ruin his chances at election, and most likely the rest of his political career. I assume that's why Tatsuya Sudou is locked up in a Sanitarium in the first place."

"*That's what I figured…*"

"How did that election turn out anyway? You said there was a scandal and I don't remember this guy at all, so he probably did not get elected?"

"*That's the least of it. He was declared dead by the police a few weeks from now, but there are no details about his death whatsoever. It was a closed-casket funeral.*"

"Maybe JOKER-corp got to him? Sudou apparently leaves the bodies in pieces."

"*That could be it*" said Doctor Roman "*but we have no way of knowing."*

So, the corrupt politician and his crazy murder son are mutually trying to murder each other. That checked out. However "That still doesn't explain the Singularity."

"*No, it doesn't. The only thing that could possibly be related to the Singularity is the Oracle of Maia that you mentioned. We are trying to cross-reference it, but so far nothing has turned up. The Pleiades are the only solid mythological connection, but we can't find anything regarding this text. Your only real lead is to follow Sudou's suggestion and go to Yumezaki. Perhaps if you gather information on the Triads you'll find out more about the current situation."*

"I thought as much… Bedivere, Mash, hide your weapons and try cleaning up your Mystic Codes. We are trying to look like we just came out of the woods but try to look decent. We'll

just try passing for crazy tourists or something. Fou, you better hide somewhere, I don't think we can explain you."

"Fou!"

With that, they finally made their way down the street.

…

"I'm sorry, but *clubbing*?"

"What, you guys didn't know?"

"Actually, uh, no we didn't."

"Sheesh, guess you really are tourists… It's not a good idea to go to some random place without knowing anything about it, you know."

Don't I know it.

When they finally got to the city outskirts, it was not too long before they found a cyclist and started asking questions. And Yumezaki, as it turned out, was the entertainment district. The place was a hotspot for the local youth, with various dance clubs, a very large shopping district, and even a casino.

"Well, we heard some pretty weird rumours about Yumezaki on the way here, that's why we thought asking…"

The cyclist frowned. "The ones about the mafia or weird Chinese dudes or something buying Club Zodiac? I dunno man, they wouldn't allow all those high-schoolers to keep clubbing in there if that were the case, right? I mean, sure they never were the most law-abiding club, with them breaking them letting kids drink and dance past midnight, but…" he shrugged "if that was my new lair I wouldn't let drunk teens in it, you know?"

Fan-fucking-tastic.

Wait. "Where did you hear that from?"

"I dunno, everyone's talking about it." What, so Sudou just- picked up that rumour from the *street*? What the hell?

Speaking of which… "Sorry, but can I ask you something else?"

"Sure, I don't mind."

Let's see how popular Sudou's services *really* were. "We heard some stuff on the news about a serial killer named JOKER? What's up with that."

"A goddamn mess is what. There's this rumour, if you call your own number, he'll pick it up, and then you tell him who you want to kill. The next day he sends a calling card saying

"you're next", and the day after that he shows up and kills you. I dunno if that phone thing really works, but that way too many bodies, man."

"How many?"

"Around… Man, I don't even know. It's definitely in double digits now."

"And nobody caught the guy?"

"Police has no evidence at all! Bullshit, if you ask me."

Now THAT sounded suspicious.

"Did the police ever look into that Triads rumour? About the club?"

"Nope."

"Thank you. Sorry for taking up so much of your time."

"It's nothing. You all take care out there, alright? It's getting pretty dangerous!"

"We will!"

The man left them.

Ritsuka immediately sent a message to Doctor Roman. *"The police is DEFINITELY on Tatsuzou Sudou's pocket."*

Ritsuka felt a wave of satisfaction. Progress!

"Um, Senpai? How will we get to Yumezaki?"

Oh right. She forgot about that. Damnit Sudou.

…

Chapter 2 section 2: Hardcore Entertainment
Area: Yumezaki, Streets

Ritsuka and the others were extremely used to long trecks, but getting from the edge of Sumaru City to the near center of it proved to be an extreme annoyance. They decided to take the bus – after asking a few other locals about which line went where – and the city was in *dire* need of a subway system. The sheer number of people in each bus was insane, and it was a miracle anyone could find a seat. Unfortunately, said subway system was still under construction, and was running late due to undisclosed reasons. Somebody said something about ruins, but whatever.

Mash and Bedivere were clearly uncomfortable. *Especially* Mash. Despite putting on a brave face, she was clearly overwhelmed by the number of people who had their bodies pressed so close to her. Her face was pale and her eyes wide, and she was breaking a cold sweat.

Without thinking about it, Ritsuka put a hand on her shoulder and pulled her close, ignoring the dirty look she got from some random passenger.

Now that she thought about it, this was quite the intimate position… She was kind of expecting more people to look at them weird, especially since they were in a Japanese city in the nineties. Now that she thought about it, there was a surprisingly high number of non-natives here as well. Interesting.

Ritsuka pulled Mash even closer. "Don't worry, we'll be at the stop soon."

Fortunately, Ritsuka's word proved true, and before they knew it they were at the bus stop.

Yumezaki was as bright and bubbly as advertized. There were posters literally everywhere, huge ads that while not America huge, still covered fairly big parts of various buildings, tall architecture, lit up neon signs in a trendy 90's style, and loud music playing from several different stores. It was afternoon by now so it looked like all the youths in the city had gathered here. Ritsuka could make out uniforms from at least three different high schools, and several other teens with no uniforms at all, instead wearing trendy and fancy clothing. Small crowds were everywhere, chatting, yelling, smoking, shopping, crowding inside the myriad stores.

It was not quite as chaotic as early Babylonia, but it was close. It had been a long time since Ritsuka was thrust into the heart of modernity like that – even if it was twenty years prior modernity. Shinjuku did not count. Ritsuka did not voice any of those thoughts.

"Damn, for a place supposedly overtaken by the Triads, it sure is lively here."

Bedivere heaved a sigh. "I suppose the average teenager would not be overly concerned with such things."

"M-maybe we should ask someone where Club Zodiac is…?"

Mash sounded incredibly intimidated. When she was Awake, she had absolutely no issue with crowds – it was something she grew out of a long time ago – but unawake and this early in the loop she still had not dealt with any significant number of people. Despite her eagerness to see new sights she was still nervous.

"Sure, let's go ask. It'll be way faster than go look for it ourselves."

She motioned both Mash and Bedivere, and the three approached a group of girls carrying an overly large number of shopping bags.

"Hello, can we ask you something? We're looking for directions."

One of them – a blonde one who looked Caucasian – looked a bit surprised. "Directions? Haven't you been in Yumezaki before?" she asked in perfect Japanese.

"No, we're here on vacation from another town, and we heard it's a cool club…"

"Hehe, it really is!" said another of the girls. "There are a lot of people from our school hanging out there in the afterhours! Some college-age dudes too, so you don't need to worry." She directed an obvious wink towards Bedivere. He blushed a bit, not knowing what to make out of this. She giggled.

Well, even without the immortal for a while bit, Bedivere was physically at his thirties, but he had enough of a Saberface baby-face to pass for younger. Not that she was going to tell them that.

The trio of girls gave them directions – "it's in that four-floor building over there; the ground floor has a lot of small shops but the club has a section of the ground floor and all the other floors to itself. I heard they remodeled them to make a maze of some sorts? Anyway, the doors are bright red. You can't miss it" – and bid them goodbye.

"Thanks!"

"No problem! Have fun!"

Once they were out of hearing range, Ritsuka hooked her arm around Mash's, startling her. "See? Wasn't so bad, was it."

Mash looked a bit hesitant, but then she smiled brightly. "You're right, Senpai. It was not as bad as I thought it would be."

"That's my Mash! Let's go hit that club!"

Mash's bright blush was more than worth it. "R-Right!"

Bedivere chuckled at their antics and followed them.

…

True to the girls' word, Club Zodiac really wasn't hard to find. While it did not have the fanciest sign ever – since it had to share the building with other businesses – it seemed that everyone *did* know about the place. Fortunately, it was too early yet for traffic to pick up – didn't that cyclist say something about them serving drinks post-midnight? Was it even legal for underage kids to be here? Probably not – so they did not have any hard time getting in the building.

"Wait, Ritsuka."

"What's wrong, Edmond?" The red doors of the club were right before them.

"Can't you feel that?"

Wait…

"Mash, Bedivere, eyes open. Edmond is sensing something."

Maybe they really hit the jackpot?

Mash focused her senses like she always did. *"I can sense them. Not exactly a servant signature, but…"*

"But…?"

"I'm not sure how to describe it… Sudou gave a similar reading, but his felt much… darker."

Ritsuka immediately pulled out her cellphone and sent a message to Doctor Roman, glad she insisted on finding a way to communicate non-verbally a few months back. Video calls could be extremely inconvenient when trying to be stealthy, or hide said calls.

"Dr., area rds not Srvt but cls"

His response was a thumbs-up emoji. Thank god he understood fast typing.

"We have completely blown any cover we had" complained Edmond in her head. Ritsuka had to agree. Even if it was for a few short moments, they had stayed still for too long to look inconspicuous.

The small shops in here were already closed… probably not wanting to deal with the traffic from the club. That meant it was practically empty right now. Good.

"Let's call them out."

Everyone got ready.

"How about you show up?"

No response.

Bedivere stepped forward. "We have already sensed your presence. Please step forward and announce your intentions, or else we'll find out by another way."

"Sheesh, I'm not that suicidal. Here's a counteroffer – how about you forget I was ever here and continue on with your business? I have no intention of picking a fight with you. You should have sense by now I can't take on all three of you."

It was a deep gravely voice, of a man either in his late forties, or a chainsmoker. Her sensitive kitsune nose told her it was likely the latter.

Also, his statement about his strength was true. Now that Ritsuka had a better sense of his aura – not quite a servant, but kind of close to that – she could tell that while decently powerful, he was no match for a regular servant – let alone her. He would probably have no issues taking down the demons in the mountains though.

"Then you should have also noticed that we can force you to talk."

Mash looked at her a bit shocked but said nothing. Sorry, Mash.

"Sorry, missy. Can't talk here."

And immediately Ritsuka was hit with the trademark sense of a bunch of debuffs slamming on her.

Shit!

She could shake them off – *easily.* But before she could even curse out, a flash of yellow and long black hair ran past them all.

"Luci-"

"停！"

"Shit!"

Out of the red door of the club came a horde of Triad members.

Shit shit shit. They were not one hundred percent in the open, but literally *anyone* could walk in right now! Were these guys *seriously* planning to start a fight right next to a busy street!?

Yes, yes they were.

"Master, what do we do!?"

They could break out. Easily. She just had to make sure than none of the thugs would follow them.

"Take cover."

And that was when she unleashed the Monte Cristo Mythologie.

Edmond's magic crest created a wave of rage-fuelled flames manifest, dark as shadows, and instantly knock everyone out.

"Sempai!?"

"Thank Edmond." Technically the truth.

"Hm, five out of ten. It could have been more subtle."

"Not now Edmond."

Behind closed doors, she could hear other people yelling.

"No time to erase their memories, we have to get out NOW."

"Try to look like nothing happened, we'll only look suspicious."

That would probably look pretty hard, considering the man from before probably rushed out of there. Still, they tried to fastwalk out of there before the club doors would burst open again.

"Well, we can consider THAT rumour confirmed… Sheesh, who sets their base in a club?"

Seriously, *why*?

"So that's what you were doing?"

What now?

Ritsuka and the others turned to see a girl leaning against the wall of the building facing the street. She was tall with a runner's build, wearing a black school uniform, with short black hair and piercing blue eyes. She would not stand out so much if not for her frosty expression – and the obvious limp on her leg as she approached them.

"Recent injury" reported Edmond. *"Healed, but not fully. I don't think she'll ever run right."*

Ritsuka honestly did not care for that right now. "You knew about the small army of Triads in there?"

The girl looked at her for a moment. "Everyone has heard the rumours. I'm just a regular at the club. I don't care too much about that."

"Then why are you talking to us?"

The girl replied with the same indifferent tone and expression as before. "I saw that long-haired man in the yellow suit coming out of here in a rush. Never seen him before. Word of advice though, don't call the cops."

Ritsuka stared at her. She was already suspecting that, but why in the world was she getting this advice from *a highschooler with no magic whatsoever*?

"OK, how do *you* know that."

For the first time, her expression switched to something strange. "I heard some stuff from a friend."

"That explains nothing."

"I'm not sharing anymore than that. It's not your business, it's his."

By "his", she probably meant the friend's. Alright, she could respect that.

"Do you know where the guy in yellow went to?"

She shrugged and pointed a thumb towards a direction. To Ritsuka's dismay, it was right in the middle of the crowd. They might as well have already lost him.

"You guys better get out of here before anyone finds anything in there."

For the first time, Mash spoke up. "How about you? If the police gets called, won't they ask you about this too?"

Perhaps it was the obvious worry in Mash's voice, but something in that girl's eyes softened just a bit. "I've already gotten the third degree from them. I'll be fine."

"Alright! Please be careful!"

With that, the three headed to the general direction of the man in yellow.

[Persona 3], [Doki Doki Literature Club], [Admin Shenanigans]
Minato Does NOT get a Day Off
Author: Venku

Minato Arisato. The man who would later become the S.E.E.S. field operative leader had an unassuming start at life. For the first ten years of his life, it was unremarkable.

That changed when he crossed the Tatsumi Port Island bridge.

His parents did not know that the Kirijo Group, a splinter of the Nanjo Group and one of the most powerful in the country, were experimenting on beings known as 'Shadows.' Gathering all twelve in one location, the Kirijo Group attempted to summon and control Death.

Death escaped. To keep the populace from knowing what happened, the Kirijo Group tasked an anti-Shadow android known as Aigis to stop Death. They met on the Moonlight Bridge, one of the main bridges of the Island. There were no victors, as Aigis destroyed the bridge and sealed Death inside Minato Arisato. There were casualties as Minato's parents perished.

Minato returned to Port Island ten years later. Enrolled in Gekkoukan High School, he would later meet Yukari Takeba and Mitsuru Kirijo. After a dream involving a young boy and a long-nosed man in a blue room, he would discover what happened that night and would make a choice.

When he discovered time was on permanent repeat and the long-nosed man, this Igor, was the Anchor that kept reality together, Minato shrugged his shoulders. He'd repeat this unless he was Awake elsewhere.

There was one question Igor never thought to ask. Minato was used to seal Nyx away from Erebos, keeping their reality safe. What would happen if he got a day off?

…

Monika Awoke and sent out a Ping. Eight Pings responded. "Weird," the Anchor for the Literature Club muttered. "This may be a busy Loop."

The Club President closed her eyes to access her Loop Memories. "What...?" Monika muttered as they came in. The School had given her, Sayori, and other Club Presidents and VP's access to a delivery service known as DoorDashing. Each Club also hosted a dual group meeting to encourage networking.

Monika's Phone beeped. Ignoring the fact she had a phone for this Loop, she read the message from Sayori.

Sayori: MonMon! Met the other Loopers Already. We're heading to the meeting. Plz, order cookies and coffee? Bringing a cute little puppy too!

Monika sighed. She accessed her DoorDashing account, saw that the school topped her funds with 30,000 yen for the month, and placed the order for sweets and coffee.

•••

Twenty minutes later, as evidenced by the clock, there was a knock on the Clubroom door. Monika bit her lower lip as she saw the sky above turn black. The knocking picked up volume, distracting her.

"Alright!" she barked out before opening. On the other side was a young man with blue hair and half-lidded eyes. Headphones hung around his neck. Behind him was another man dressed in a white shirt with a yellow sweater artfully draped against his neck.

"DoorDashing!" the blue-haired man greeted. "Cost will be 9800 yen!"

Monika took the bag. "The School has an account."

"Have a nice.." as the man spoke, the other man interrupted. "Damn it, Minato! You know we have a job. And you can see what's happening!"

The other man, called Minato, sighed. "No, Ryoji. This one Loop, I'm taking the day off."

Monika paused, opening her mouth. As she did, Ryoji dipped his head. "Ryoji Mochizuki. The other man is Minato. Yes, we're Loopers. Yes, we know what's going on."

Monika leaned against the wall. "Tell me," she all but ordered.

"Love to but won't," Minato replied. He began to walk. "C'mon Ryoji," Minato called out.

"Why do you let him do this?" Monika asked.

"People think I follow him around like a bloodthirsty puppy. Most days it amuses us," Ryoji responded.

"Like now?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

•••

Sayori was the Vice President of the Looping Literature Club. Her baseline had her effectively absent due to Monika's manipulation. It was a sore topic with each Doki. Monika, through her baseline, manipulated each of them. Only through millennia did they manage to find a way to work together.

A sore point for each was mental manipulation. Sayori's sore point was death references through mental manipulation. While initially torching most of this part of the Amala cluster,

she had managed to speak with key members.

There was a mutual understanding: Each Persona user did not manipulate a Doki without consent, and the Dokis didn't rearrange them.

Sometimes, they worked together. Take now as an example.

Sayori dropped the facade of being sweet and bubbly, and allowed her training as Darth Somnus, Smiling Lord of the Sith, to take over. Her justification was to cut down on collateral damage. Channeling the internalized negativity, her hands arced out as crimson bolts of electricity came forth. It shot out and fried some of the Shadow Demons, while others just smirked.

"Times like this, I wish we had Mission Control!" a grey-haired youth shouted next to her. Akihiko Sanada, Amala Looper, and blood knight cracked his knuckles and charged forward. Out of respect to Sayori, he and the other two Loopers did not use their Evokers, channeling another method taught by their Anchor. "Come, Caesar!" A ghostly Roman in an Emperor's cloak charged forward and slashed at two more blobs, destroying them.

"Why?" Sayori asked.

"What dumbass didn't tell you," another man began. He was Shinjiro Aragaki, another Amala Looper. "Is some Persona can reveal an enemy's weakness. Those who enjoy knowledge for the sake of knowledge." He snarled as a dog yipped. "Someone wanna help Koromaru out?" he asked. Shinjiro visualized the arrival of his Persona. "Castor!" he shouted. A blonde man dressed in dark armor rode a dark horse. The horse charged and swiped at three big shadows.

"Got it," Yuri murmured. She chose to dress in her Hunter Attire from Yharnam. As Yuri told Natsuki, "Since we're fighting eldritch-crazed things, I should accessorize." Yuri fired her flintlock, attacking a group of Shadows. As she did this, Natsuki was in her Majin form. The Smallest Doki called out: "Candy Beam!". Bolts of pink energy enveloped the group surrounding the Shiba Inu, fighting with his Persona. They disappeared into dog biscuits. Koromaru yipped while looking at Natsuki.

"Eat up, cutie," Natsuki replied, reaching down to pet Koromaru who took the head pat. She turned to Sayori and blinked. A gigantic beast was approaching, then saw Sayori and ran.

"What the fuck, Sayori?" Natsuki called out. "And where is the other Looper!"

"Don't know, but I'm reaching out!" Sayori didn't yet tell them that she stopped the descent of Nyx by tapping fully into her Sith ability. When you scare an Eldritch Abomination, it remembers.

...

Minato, as the world burned, enjoyed the walk in the park. He was ignoring the signs of the Shadows and the occasional Daemon who showed. Wanting a day off, he was not happy that the Universe seemed to conspire against him.

That didn't stop him from handling the situations if they got close. A summon of Black Frost here, of Yoshitsune there. Hell, Ryoji even used his powers to snap a few of the Daemons into nothing.

"Are you going to stop Nyx and Erebos?" Ryoji asked.

"Why?"

"You know wh..what's going on?"

At that time, Minato dodged behind a tree. There was a voice calling out to him. "*Minato...Minato...*"

"Yes, strange voice in my head?"

"*Hi! I'm Sayori! I'm the Looping Literature Club Vice President. It'd be swell if you came to help us.*"

"Sorry, no."

"*You're not arguing about the mental talk?*" Sayori asked, confused.

"You're a Looper. Probably had a weird Loop, and it stuck."

There was a giggle heard in response. "*Fair enough,*" Sayori responded. "*However, I'm speaking to you know as Darth Somnus, Smiling Lord of the Sith. You familiar with the term?*"

Ryoji, who was able to overhear being sound bound, did. "You're..."

"*Oh? Who's that?* ***Oh! Hi!***" Sayori repeated. "*Look, I'm sorry for scaring you and Erebos, but that was a bad time in my formative years. Oh, come back here, Nyx!*" Sayori all but shouted.

Minato paused, unsure what to say.

"*Look. If you will not come back, I can promise you this,*" Sayori replied. At that moment, Minato began to see crudely drawn sharks. They began to sing in an off-key voice. "Mmm. BABY SHARK Dodododooodoo!"

"Alright, alright!" Minato called out. "I'm coming!"

...

It was a simple resolution. Though Erebos and Nyx ran screaming from Sayori, the Looping Literature Club and Amala Loopers were able to contain them.

As the Loop was drawing to a close, Minato was sitting outside, Koromaru on his lap. Ryoji was sketching a portrait nearby, back to a tree.

Sayori and Natsuki walked outside, holding two boxes.

Ryoji rose and bowed. "Ladies."

Sayori giggled as Natsuki stepped forward. "Here, Dorks. Your other two friends have their cupcakes, even though Akihiko is recovering from a swift punch."

Minato took one. "Why?" he asked. The cupcakes were of a kitten design. "Cute."

"Watch it, buddy," Natsuki mock warned before shaking her head. "He put protein powder on it."

Minato and Ryoji winced. Koromaru, fed his treat by Sayori, hid his face with his paw in embarrassment.

"A usual thing?" Sayori asked.

Minato nodded. "Well..sorry about everything," he replied to Sayori. She waved it off with a small smile. "It's ok."

Natsuki nodded. "Indeed. We'll pay you losers back later."

Ryoji sighed as Koromaru yipped in amusement.

...

Epilogue:

Minato was hanging from the doorframe to the Seal, the Loop coming to an end when a Portal approached.

"E..Elizabeth?" he asked weakly.

The grey-haired woman nodded her head. "Sorry about this. Master was sent a message."

"By Masakado?"

"No. Psyche." Ignoring Minato's look, Elizabeth put down a tape recorder and pressed play. A clear, crisp feminine voice spoke.

"Minato Arisato of the Amala Branch. I am Psyche, the Admin for the Doki Doki Literature Club. While I understand and sympathize with your actions, they do require retribution. Masakado coded this to play during your next ten loops via your headphones."

Psyche's voice vanished. The song began.

"Baby shark...do do do do doo doo"

Fate/Grand Order fused snips

Chapter Notes

> Every snip here is a fused loop with the videogame Fate/Grand Order, so I'll only be specifying the SMT fandom in the summary.

[Persona 2]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – parts 7 and 8
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

Chapter 3 section 1: Rumourmonger
Area: Yumezaki

Predictably, any search for the man in yellow turned out to be fruitless. While the short glimpse that they got from him indicated that he was quite memorable, by the time that they managed to escape the Triad goons, and talking to that girl, he had already been lost to the crowd. Ritsuka even attempted having Roman track the guy, but with the signal interference in the radar there was no hint of him. Maybe it was some sort of presence concealment – who knew.

However, running after the guy would only draw attention to themselves at this point, and so the three of them decided to sit down at a café and decide their next move. It was a bit difficult with all the crowds, but eventually they managed to find a somewhat secluded corner – at least with all the noise from the other customers it would be hard to listen in to their conversation.

Ritsuka set the communication device in the middle of the table.

"Doctor Roman, you listening?"

With a bit of static, the device came to life. "*Yes, the connection is pretty stable for now."*

"Any luck in locating our guy?"

"*None so far. However, that is not too surprising. As you said, he has readings that are very similar to that of a servant. We were able to confirm this in the command room during the time you were talking. We haven't managed to get too many details from him, but it should be enough to track him when he slips up."*

"Maybe he has Presence Concealment or something…"

"*He does. We compiled what little data we managed to gather from him. I'll send you the file. Please open it as soon as you get it."*

A moment later, her communication device beeped. It was a file titled "Man in Yellow". As ordered, Ritsuka opened it.

True Name: *-*
Aliases: Man in Yellow (assigned by Chaldea staff)
Class: Assassin
Alignment: -

Attribute: *-*

Traits: *Male, Hominidae Servant, Humanoid, Living Human, Male, Pseudo-Servant, Weak to Emuna Elish*

Strength: *-*
Agility: D
Endurance: -
Mana: D
Luck: -

Class Skills

Presence Concealment
As of yet unconfirmed. Rank unknown.

Personal Skills

Sabotage C

"That's a lot of gaps there… How much are you sure about?"

Doctor Roman looked pretty sheepish. *"We were able to detect his Mana rank and his Sabotage skill when he attacked you to escape. His Agility rank is mostly a hypothesis. As for the traits, we just put down the most likely ones. We believe him to be a pseudo-servant or something close – it's not the first time we've seen living humans keep up with heroic spirits through a variety of means, so the irregular servant reading should be covered by that."*

Bedivere blinked. "I was using a Noble Phantasm though. The King of the Cavern would have warned us if he sensed anything like that from that man, correct?"

Edmond gave his affirmation.

"It wasn't just you, Sir Bedivere" said Mash. "Francis Drake held a Holy Grail that allowed her to fight servants and ghosts, while Nero… Well…"

"Just blame Imperial Priviledge. I'm honestly not sure what's up with that skill. But yeah, there were a few more cases too. Just ask Edmond."

Bedivere shifted in interest.

"*I'm not answering that."*

Dr. Roman cleared his throat. *"Anyway, this is all that we can give you right now. Unfortunately, I'm afraid it's not enough…"*

"Any ideas? We know that the mafia has a base in Club Zodiac now. What do we do with that info?"

Roman appeared deep in thought. *"Hmm… Well, we do know now that Tatsuzou Sudou is involved in the political scandal, the serial murders, the Triad presence in the city, and quite possibly controls the police. It would be reasonable to guess that he has the Grail. Now that we have evidence of his corruption, and we know that he's about to die, it's entirely plausible that he'll use the grail to avert his own death and win the election. While this does not sound like something major enough to cause a derailment in Proper Human History, with the connections he appears to have, there's no telling what course the country would take."*

"So we have to find the guy. I mean, we *could* try beating up the Triad guys but I doubt any of them will talk. Even if we get to the leader, there's no guarantee he can lead us to Sudou or anything."

"*True. Still, this is an avenue worth pursuing. And the only one we can actually point down…"*

"It would be unwise" said Bedivere. "Now that they're aware of our presence, I'm certain that they are in high guard. It's entirely possible that they will move their base in the near future, as its location has been compromised."

"Has it though?" countered Ritsuka. "Practically everyone knows about their location. I mean- sorry but it just bothers me. Who even spreads stuff like that?"

"Uh, Senpai?"

Dealing with Mash when she was Awake and when she was not was… interesting. When Awake, she was always confident and ready to speak her mind, but she was much more timid and naïve when like this. Her terror during the bus ride proved it. Still, whenever she had to say something, Ritsuka made sure to take it seriously.

"What is it, Mash?"

"About where those rumours came from… The girl from earlier did say that she heard it from a friend of hers, correct?"

Doctor Roman opened his mouth to probably say something like "every heard it from someone else, obviously" but Ritsuka cut him off with a wave of her hand. She could tell that Mash was going somewhere with this.

"She also told us that "it was his business" and not to call the cops. I'm only speculating but… maybe this friend of hers knows more than just the rumours?"

Roman thought about it. *"You may be right, but… It'd be even harder to find this person than the man in yellow. Our only lead to him is that girl, we don't who she is either and she*

already refused to tell us anything about her friend."

Ritsuka scowled. "So our only leads are a criminal organization that'll probably refuse to tell us anything, a guy so good at hiding that Chaldea can't find him despite having readings, a girl who already refused to tell us anything, and her mysterious friend who may or may not know something. Oh, and the *psycho serial killer*. Not much of a lead, there."

Roman looked a bit defeated. *"I guess all we can do here in Chaldea is keep searching for the man in yellow… So far he is the only one who seems to have a concrete answer. He admitted that he cannot take you in a fight, so if you manage to corner him you should be able to glean more information."*

"Yeah, information. We definitely need more of that."

"Maybe there are more rumours?" suggested Bedivere. "In my experience, most rumours have hints of truth in them, even if they are born from misunderstandings."

"Somethings bugging me about that too" replied Ritsuka. "Like – literally EVERYONE knows about the JOKER and the Triads? The JOKER I get it, it's on the news, but call your own number and he'll come, who even believes that enough to try it?"

"*Perhaps someone tried it BECAUSE they did not believe it."*

"Yeah, that could be it… Seriously though, who even SPREADS this stuff?"

"Maybe… we can find out."

They all looked at Mash again. "Are you suggesting we hunt down rumours?"

"Well, they seem to be all we have… I'll admit, I feel at great unease. In all the previous Singularities, the cause of the disturbance was much more obvious… Even though we have pointed Tatsuzou Sudou as the one responsible behind this Singularity, I cannot help but feel uncertain about this situation."

"Yeah, there's no reason for Sudou to spread weird stuff about himself…"

Ritsuka slammed her hands on the table. "It's been decided! Doctor, you try find the yellow suit guy. The rest of us, let's chase some more rumours!"

That was when the waitress came in, carrying in their coffees. Ritsuka quickly slammed the device shut and hid it.

"Excuse me for overhearing, but did you say something about chasing rumours?"

«Yeah…?»

«Have you ever heard of the Sumaru Bulletin?»

…

Chapter 3 section 2: Rumourmonger
Area: Aoba

"This must be the place."

"Sure seems like it."

The waitress, as it turned out, knew exactly where to look for rumours: on the internet. Well, this sounded like the peak of common sense, but even in Japan, the internet was not the most widespread or developed thing ever in the Nineties – even in the late Nineties.

However, that was not the weird part. The weird part was that the website hosting those rumours – Sumaru Bulletin – was only available through specific locations, to specific people. The way she described it sounded like a forum board, though she seemed unsure because she had never logged in or anything. She just happened to know that you could log in the website from that one computer at that one internet café.

This was *peak* suspicious.

Well, this was the café. It was called Double Slash – as in, 2/ because internet cafes were too new to be creative or overly gamer-y with their names. Everything was dyed in that neon blue that just screamed Nineties Chillwave and Ritsuka could make out music from the genre in question coming from inside.

With affirming nods from her two companions, they walked right in.

The first thing that stood out to Ritsuka were the wall covering aquariums. The second was the very unsettling feeling from some random woman standing in the corner.

Literally as soon as they entered in, she got right in their faces. Or rather, Ritsuka's face.

Edmond said Ritsuka through the mental link, ready to warn him to keep his guard up. But he was already on it.

The woman stared right in her eyes.

"You are different. You are one of them."

And then the unsettling feeling was gone and she returned dazed to where she was standing like nothing happened.

…What the hell was that.

The rest of the customers simply threw passing glances at them, perhaps an extra curious look at the woman.

Bedivere, ever the knight, decided to approach her.

"Excuse me miss, is something the matter?"

The woman looked at him. "Oh, no, nothing wrong! Would you like me to read me your fortune? I'm really good at Wang Long fortune telling!"

…What?

She does what now?

"What's "Wand Long" fortune telling?"

The woman looked astonished. "You don't know? It's the most popular fortune telling method now!"

He shook his head. Ritsuka decided to stay back. She had absolutely no idea what made that fortune telling girl react like that to her, but right now she did not want a repeat.

The woman was very eager to explain. "Wang Long fortune telling is a fortune telling method that relies on the movement of twelve dragons over laylines. It is extremely accurate too. There is one dragon for each month. Basically… if you do good things, good things happen to you. If you do bad things, then well… You know."

Ritsuka did not even know where to begin unpacking this statement. First of all, *luck did not work like that*. It was a very common misconception about how Karma worked, and one that she knew was completely and utterly wrong. Second, the whole concept of "following the movements of dragons" was absurd. There were no dragons this late in the age of man, and certainly none that someone could "follow". What kind of average Joe could possibly trace the movement of a dragon? And finally… laylines? Was this just a buzzword to make the fortune telling method look "legit", or were they seriously talking about laylines used for magecraft? Either way, it was concerning.

Now Ritsuka seriously started to wish that Waver was here. He was far better at figuring out this kind of mystery or nonsense.

While she was pondering all this, Bedivere politely refused the woman's offer and thanked her for her explanation, and she said that she was always here if they ever wanted a reading.

She spent the entire day studying in the middle of an internet café reading fortunes for free. Okay… Maybe that little thing earlier was her sales pitch or something. At least she wasn't trying to advertise her private murder business.

Now, to find a way to connect to that weird website…

Strangely enough, one of the PC screens – oh god, they were *box* screens, they really were in the Nineties – had an orange casing instead of the blue casing that all the others had. It seemed really obvious, but…

Ritsuka approached the screen and sat down, looking at the dude at the counter wearing what she assumed was an employee T-shirt. He looked completely bored out of his mind, blankly staring at some magazine.

Secure in the knowledge that this guy would not be bothering her, Ritsuka opened the interned icon, trying not to be overwhelmed by how *surreal* this was. *Nineties internet.* Seriously.

Well, she did not have to try to figure out how to access Sumaru Bulletin because that was the first thing the tab opened to.

Ritsuka was floored. What even… Did they purposefully set up this PC to open to Sumaru Bulletin? Why was nobody raising an eyebrow at her for using this PC? Was the man at the counter secretly watching her? The fortune teller girl? Why was nobody reacting to her using a PC intended to access a private forum!? Was the forum even private in the first place!?

What even *was* this?

You'll solve this later Ritsuka, just read up on the rumours for now.

The site seemed to have a number of users, most of them using generic user names. The first thing she saw was a comment about a rumour she heard earlier today about how they found ruins, though the user was convinced it had more to do with late payments or something. There was an ongoing debate about whether or not some bar sold firearms (Ritsuka had to snort at that, as if anyone could get away with that in Japan) and a lot of other nonsensical stuff about various businesses in the area.

It was not long before she found stuff about the JOKER, but…

Reading through this forum was an exercise in frustration. She could not find the origin of *anything.* "A friend from school heard it from a guy from his part-time work who heard it from his cousin". "That foreign college dude who sells trinkets down the street heard it from a couple that passed by". "I think I saw an article about it". "I dunno, the guys at work mentioned it". "I heard about it for the first time here, to be honest". No starting point. *None*.

There was no use going like this. She had to have something specific.

Behind her, she could tell that Mash was worried so she flashed her a smile to put her more at ease. Bedivere had and bought a few water bottles and sandwiches from the dude at the counter, which Ritsuka ate gratefully. This day did not have a good start.

She started focusing on the mafia rumours, and whatever she could find on Club Zodiac.

The first thing that popped up was a rumour about the new owners of Club Zodiac remodeling all floors above the dance floor into a maze of some sort, and people were debating how valid were those rumours and what would the maze be used for. Some kind of escape room? A trap room to catch anyone sneaking into Triad headquarters?

She started reading more carefully trying to follow that Triad conversation and…

"I thought their base was at that abandoned factory in Konan? I see some weird cars now and then."

There. A hint. An actual source. Perhaps this person was just trolling, but it was the very first post that was not in the style of "I heard from a friend of a friend". She had to check it out.

Ritsuka turned to Mash, who was staring at her anxiously. "Mash, we're going to Konan."

[Persona 4]
A Stay of Execution – Introduction
Author: Conceptualist

?

When Charles-Henri Sanson came to, it was to the clip-clop sound of a horse hooves on a stone road. Not a sound he was unused to, but ever since he had found himself as a Heroic Spirit and later a Looper, it was much less common. When a technologically modern option was widely available, it usually completely supplanted the horse and buggy of his era.

The familiar sound of creaking carriage wheels and nickering horses was still bizarre, even after sorting through the memories from prior to his remembering of himself. The last thing that happened to him was getting on a bus to go visit some family for the summer, and taking a quick nap. And while funky and super-realistic dreams were common enough for a Servant, they weren't for the high-school aged child he was now in the role of.

Doing his best to stay in character, Sanson looked to the other passengers in the anachronistic vehicle. A bizarre looking old man whose bloodshot eyes seemed to be drinking in the blue color-coordinated interior, looking everywhere but at Sanson, and a sharply dressed lady who's prim and proper outfit made her look like she belonged exactly where she was.

"Excuse me," Sanson interrupted in completely unaccented japanese. "But do you have any idea of where I am or how I got here?"

The long-nosed old man nodded, tearing his eyes away from their surroundings to meet Sanson's own gaze. "Ah, it seems our dear visitor has finally Woken Up, as we Loopers term it. Let me be the first to welcome you to the Velvet Room," the man said. "I, your humblest of Anchors, am Igor. To my left is Margaret, my lovely aide, who will be working for you on a number of things. Assuming, of course, you accept the terms of the deal."

Margaret seemed to be mildly confused by Igor's behavior, as if he was going unexpectedly off script, but only mildly.

"Now, ordinarily I would begin with a spiel about fate and destiny, dramatically telling your fortune using these tarot cards," Igor continued, tapping a of cards whose corner was peaking out of his waist pocket. "But judging from how the Velvet Room appears, you seem to be a man who doesn't hold much stock in such things. A self-made man these days, instead of who the people of the world made you."

"That sounds accurate," Sanson agreed, an eyebrow raised. "So if you won't be doing that, why am I here?"

"How would you like to help save the world?" Igor asked, a broad grin cutting across his face.

After a more detailed explanation of what was at stake if things kept going on track in Inaba, how could Sanson say anything but yes? Igor did seem disappointed that on Awakening Sanson had lost the special state of mind and attitude that made for a "Proper Wild Card" but assured Sanson that it wouldn't unduly hinder his ability to help.

To keep a long story short, Inaba was in the process of becoming a focal point of this Loop's equivalent of the Reverse Side of the World. Someone would go around, pulling humans into the realm of thought and id, and this would draw forth their Shadow, the inner darkness and suppressed thoughts of a person made manifest. Once the Shadow had been separate for long enough, had grown strong enough, they would inevitably kill the human they spawned from.

The more this happened, the closer the realm of the collective human heart would come to the surface of reality. And if that would happen unstopped, it would spread its influence out and draw everything that made a person themself deep within, ultimately merging the world of emotion and reality until thought and reality would be one and the same.

Speaking from prior experience, Igor assured Sanson that if it did happen the strong and determined would probably survive the transition. But it still would be the ending of the human world and the world of the unconscious to fuel the creation of a new one.

And the best way for Sanson to save this doomed world?

Go to high school and make friends.

[Persona 2]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – parts 9 to 12
Author: me

Chapter 4 section 1: Machinations
Area: Konan

Konan turned out to be a pretty busy area. According to the map sign geared towards tourists, seeing how it was right on Sumaru beach – as in, the only place where people could actually come to swim – the area hosted the Police Headquarters, the Aerospace Museum which was undoubtedly the destination for every single school looking to visit something educational, a collection of tourist trap shops across the beach, a number of apartment complexes that by the looks of things were built rather recently, its own small shopping district and… an abandoned factory.

Ritsuka expected the factory to be in a less central location instead of smack dab in the middle of the city. Then again, it probably *was* outside the city when it was first built. Cities had a habit of expanding after all.

"Where we would find mysterious black cars…?" asked Mash with a perplexed – and adorable – frown on her face. "My detective novels are not really modern…"

It was at times like this Ritsuka wanted to hug the living daylights out of Mash. She refrained though because she could actually do it.

"Well, there's a number of notable locations here…" started Bedivere.

Ritsuka looked around to ensure they were not being overheard. "First of all, the police headquarters. We already know they're corrupt."

"*No, they wouldn't"* interjected Edmond, making sure he was heard by everyone. *"It's too obvious. Even though there are rumours of police corruption, there's likely no concrete evidence for it and they would likely prefer to keep it that way. They would never choose the police station as a meeting spot."*

"So the remaining locations…" started Mash "…are… the factory? I can't think of anything else…"

"Or some fancy penthouse" added Ritsuka. "No chance of finding a specific penthouse though."

"Can't we search for magical signatures? …Oh right, there's no guarantee they use magecraft."

"You got this."

Ritsuka would not admit it out loud, but she enjoyed this detective work.

"We check the factory first. We have to be extremely careful. If it's really a base for the Triads, we should expect all entrances and exits to be guarded. We're basically walking into a trap here. And we're still in the middle of the city. We can't go too crazy.

Ritsuka received nods from all around. Everyone understood the stakes. Good.

"Let's go."

…

Standing outside the factory was intimidating. Broken windows and rusted pipes, peeling paint and all sorts of rain damage, it looked like it had been abandoned for several years. Whatever plaque or similar that once proclaimed what company it belonged to and what it produced had long since vanished. The fact that this place was still standing was a testament to the power of reinforced concrete.

The front gates were unlocked.

This was a trap. It had to be a trap.

Ritsuka was quiet, examining how to handle the situation. Strangely enough, she could spot not other entrances at it stood – maybe they were locked of covered up to prevent people from entering. However, regardless of the possible scenarios, the crew from Chaldea had no choice but to walk right through the front doors.

She examined the place for security cameras. She did not find any. That was good, she supposed…

Her messenger binged.

"Ritsuka here. Hey Da Vinci-chan."

"*Hey, Ritsuka! We're getting a pretty strong reading from your location! Pretty sure you're sitting over a leyline. Maybe even a laypool!"*

A laypool. Of course. "We're at the entrance of an abandoned factory which may or may not be headquarters for the Triads. Or something."

Da Vinci blinked, clearly not expecting that. From further in Dr. Roman's voice could be heard. *"Triads, sitting on a leyline? Common criminals?"*

Wait 'till you see Shinjuku, thought Ritsuka, knowing full well that Romani would never get to see it.

"*Can you detect any bounded fields?"* asked Da Vinci.

"Nothing. Why, you didn't find anything either?"

"*Sorry, interference. We only picked up the layline because well… It really IS powerful. That's why we think it may be a laypool."*

Mash decided to interject. "This is the only layline we found so far… Don't tell me we'll have to set up a summoning circle here!"

"Better than the Sanitarium…"

"*Things sure seem interesting over there!"* said Da Vinci. *"I wish I could come!"*

Well, they had no need of extra hands quite yet but Ritsuka had a feeling that was going to change pretty soon.

"We can't linger too long at the entrance. We're going in, check if there are triads in here, look for more information and set up a summoning circle if possible."

"*Gotcha~! Call back when you get in trouble!"*

"Will do." Ritsuka turned off the communicator, and turned to her servants.

"Bedivere, can you sneak inside-"

"*I'll do it."*

"Edmond? But you just examined the Sanitarium earlier this morning?"

"*Something about this Singularity makes it more… comfortable to manifest. I assume that's because Sudou is constantly leaving his cell. Imprisonment and closed doors have little*

meaning in the city. I'll be fine in Spirit mode."

"If you say so…"

Edmond assured his master and Bedivere that he was fine with doing more legwork. Ritsuka was unaccustomed to the feeling of her head being so empty, but she tolerated it nonetheless. Better than to go in blind.

They sat in a half-hidden corner, away from wondering eyes, waiting for Edmond to report back.

He was silent for a long time.

"…What do you think he'll find in there?"

Bedivere thought about it for a second. "Since it's the Triads, I assume weapons, illegal stacks of money, stolen goods, drugs… I suppose… I'm not terribly familiar with the status of the Far East as of the last few decades…"

"Fair enough." With her baseline starting when it did, Ritsuka was barely aware of what was happening in the outside world herself.

"*…Ritsuka… I don't think we'll be able to take this place for ourselves."*

This was the second time today that Edmond called her out like this. This seemed just as grave… and yet there was a undercurrent of… something else in there.

«Edmond?»

"*…this is much bigger than we thought."*

…

Chapter 4 section 2: Machinations
Area: Abandoned Factory

"What do you mean, a *war machine* factory?"

"*I believe the modern term is a "mech". They are vaguely humanoid bipedal tank-like constructs with a piloting cockpit designed for a single user, approximately three meters in height each. They each are equipped with several types of armaments, both pre-built and equipped."*

Edmond stopped for a moment to let Ritsuka, Bedivere and Mash take all this in.

"There's more, isn't there." It was not a question. If it was just the robots, Edmond would not be this concerned.

"*Yes. The entire project seems to be in some capacity funded by a military organization. I'm unable to tell if it's the national army or a paramilitary group."*

"I suppose this means the corruption runs deeper than just the foreign minister…" said Bedivere.

Ritsuka nodded her agreement. "What else?"

"*…There are magical signatures all around. I sensed the presence of several demons on the upper levels of the factory."*

"Probably attracted to the layline…"

"*…as well as the mechs themselves."*

"…You sensed magical signatures from the *mechs*?"

"That's horrible!" said Mash. "It's like they're trying to build an army of magic constructs!"

"*That's the conclusion I also drew from this."*

Ritsuka did not like this at all. "This definitely explains why this place is a Singularity. In Proper Human History, Tatsuzou Sudou died before he got elected, so the whole operation collapsed with him. If he uses the Holy Grail to undo his own death, then this whole mech operation is green-lighted…"

"…And the consequences would be disastrous" finished Bedivere. "The whole country, and later maybe even Asia or the world would live in terror, the criminal syndicates would thrive, and he would at least partially expose magecraft to the whole world."

"But wouldn't exposing magecraft weaken it?" asked Mash.

Ritsuka nodded in agreement, remembering Scheherazade's plan to expose magecraft to the whole world to eliminate its mystery and by association the Servant Summoning system.

"Not if they don't know it's magecraft. And remember, *belief* can have as much of an effect on the effect of magecraft as mystery. It's a delicate balance."

"*At any rate, there's no telling how the Clock Tower or foreign countries would react to this."*

"Probably with extreme prejudice" replied Ritsuka.

"We have to stop them!"

Everyone turned to Mash.

"How exactly?"

"Eh?"

Ritsuka took a deep breath.

"Remember Mash. We are in the modern – almost – era, in a city full of civilians. *Modern*, ignorant civilians. As far as they are aware, the only thing unusual going on are the serial

murders and the presence of the Triads – and most people think that second bit is just a rumour. If we charge in now, we'll probably end up with the whole army, police and the Triads all wanting our heads."

"So what do we do!?"

"We find a way to sabotage their operation. *Without* being noticed."

Still…

"We'll have to come up with a plan, and return here tomorrow."

"They'll know we were snooping at Club Zodiac by tomorrow" reminded her Bedivere.

"They probably know already. Phones are already a thing. And we still have a few aces up our sleeve. We have servants. They don't."

Bedivere looked like he wanted to say something.

"Something wrong, Bedi?"

"I'm afraid so… I'm still concerned about the man in the yellow suit."

"Maybe we can find a way to work with him?"

"If we *can* find him. Dr. Roman had no luck so far."

Honestly, despite the clear direction of their situation – stop the robot army, get rid of Tatsuzou, clear the Singularity, Ritsuka still felt like there were too many pieces missing. The yellow-suited man, the inexplicable presence of demons, the whole thing with the JOKER, the mysterious "he" who knows the police is up to something…

They may have the general picture, but it was far from the whole puzzle.

Ritsuka just hoped the missing pieces wouldn't impact their progress.

•••

Finding a hotel wasn't that hard. Just asking around led to a few kindhearted people pointing them to a cheap one in an area called "Hirasaka" – it was one of the more central ones, entirely reserved for the locals, so the hotel prices reflected that. It was a good thing too, as with a city as full of tourists and other foreign visitors as Sumaru, prices in most areas turned to skyrocket to capitalize on them as much as possible.

Mash and Ritsuka rent a room together and Bedivere rented the one right next to theirs; it would be cheaper for them all to get one with three beds, but Bedivere had a sense of propriety that was not easily swayed. Ritsuka had plenty of money to fall back on anyway. They ordered cheap takeout for dinner and sat down to discuss their following plans.

"We need to find all the data they have on their computers, copy it, and then destroy it. Better yet, steal their hard drives so they can't retrieve it. We got to destroy their equipment too, and any workshops they may have set up. We absolutely have to make sure they cannot recover from this easily."

"What about destroying the factory itself?"

"Absolutely not. It's right in the middle of the city. Too much attention." Ritsuka did not want Fourth Grail War round 2. Not that she could tell that to Mash. Besides- "It's sitting on a layline. Or a laypool. Whichever. We need it."

Mash had no argument against that.

"And after we destroy their facilities?"

"Well, they'll definitely look for who did it. That'll probably draw the yellow suit guy out, and whoever else is involved."

"*There's a chance there are more facilities than this one."*

"That's true… But we didn't have difficulties finding them the first time around. If we get the yellow suit guy to cooperate with us-"

"You really think he will help us?"

"He was already stalking the Triads so he definitely has something *against* them at the very least."

With a plan in place – even a somewhat shoddy one, Ritsuka fell to sleep, Edmond the ever watchful guardian of her dreams.

And there, she dreamt…

…

Chapter 4 section 3: Machinations
Area: ?

In her dreams he felt a presence, an intruder unlike anyone. One that was bound but not, living but not, existing but not, standing at the edge. Blue trailed in at the edge of his perception, and a voice like an angel sung a haunting song, soothing the soul into sleep. It made the chains around his heart shiver and rattle, a memory of warmth and sorrow stabbing through his core, immediately soothed. Its comfort was painful, like he was thrown into the hearth that kept the cold away from his home.

"*Do not be alarmed, guardian of dreams. I only wish to talk, and to relay a message. In private."*

He was powerful, but this entity was even more so, trumping him in every way. A vastness and depth of power that was like the ocean to his current – no matter how ferocious he was,

this was a foe that could not be trumped.

Still, he had a duty.

"*Who are you?*"

"*I would like to introduce myself once you bring Miss Fujimaru here. You are of course welcome to listen to our conversation. Mr. Edmond Dantès.*"

The rage came back. This name, in the mouth of a stranger-! "I am the Count of Monte Cristo! Edmond Dantès is dead!"

"*Indeed he is- if he ever existed. But who is to say what is fiction and what is not, in this place between sleep and reality, mind and matter?*"

His perception cleared, and the blue became overwhelming. The voice he heard was old and withered, a blue luxurious lounge or maybe a salon, and the soft piano changed the song. He recognized this one – Gymnopédie No. 1 by Erik Satie, if he recalled correctly. An interesting tune, melancholic, moody yet light.

"*Very well. I shall bring her to you.*"

She came to awareness as if emerging from a deep sleep, yet still, she felt as if she was floating.

"*Come, my accomplice. We have been invited for a special occasion by a distinguished host.*"

"*You flatter me with your words, Count of Monte Cristo.*"

It was at that point that Ritsuka realized she was not on her bed anymore. Or rather, she was, but she was taken somewhere else by her dreams. Again.

But strangely enough, Edmond did not seem alarmed at all? Weary alright, but he did not think she was in danger. That was enough to make Ritsuka relax her guard a little.

She was in a luxurious salon or lounge that was overwhelmingly blue. Everything was blue, the blue velvet couch, the long velvet curtains that surrounded the room, the marble floor. On the couch sat a strange old man, dressed in a tuxedo, his features deformed in impossible ways. Ritsuka immediately got the sense that he was not human. But the others in the room – maybe they were. A blindfolded man elegantly playing a sleek grand piano, a woman in an expensive dress singing along to his melody. At another corner was a man who at first glance did not seem to fit at all, dressed in ragged black clothes, studying his empty canvas.

Ritsuka jumped to the immediate question, and turned to the old man. He was clearly the one in charge of the place – the "host".

"*Where are we?*"

Somehow, he grinned even wider, and if she was less experienced, Ritsuka would have found it creepy.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room, a place between dream and reality, mind and matter. My name is Igor. I am pleased to make your acquaintance. These here are the other attendants at this time. Nameless, Belladonna, and the Demon Painter."

And there were some of the extra missing pieces of the puzzle.

"I am also the Anchor of the Persona branch of the Amala loops. I am delighted to meet you, Ritsuka Fujimaru." He followed that up with a Ping.

And all Ritsuka could say was "oh."

That explained some things.

"Pleased to meet you too" said Ritsuka. Something about this place – or maybe just the overly formal atmosphere – made her feel like she had to. "So what's going on in this branch? It can't just be Tatsuzou. Frankly, I've been to Amala before and Naoki Kashima doesn't have the best words."

Igor chuckled. "Yes, we acquainted. He helped us greatly with the activation of one of my other loopers, a long time ago. He may be brash and sour, but the experiences and perspectives of such people are valuable and beneficial. He saved my looper's sanity and prevented a family from breaking apart. We all are deeply grateful to him."

Now Ritsuka new Naoki for exactly one loop and even though that was not much time, she could never imagine the sour Demifiend doing anything like that. She definitely needed to hear that story one of these days, if she ever got the chance.

"But I digress." Igor returned to the topic at hand. "It is policy of the Velvet Room not to interfere directly with the matters of the physical world and the conflicts outside, only aid our guests. There are loopholes, naturally, but we cannot overstep our boundaries. I cannot tell you everything you need to know."

Of course there was a catch. Ritsuka was used to them. At least the old man wasn't planning on backstabbing them.

"In addition, I ask of you that other than the Count here, you do not speak of our encounter to your companions."

Ritsuka scoffed. "I wasn't going to – I don't want "Solomon" blowing us-" Wait. "Goetia can't hear us, can he? If he could he would have blown up this place already."

"Correct. Goetia of your loop cannot see in this space at all. In fact, I can tell you this – this Singularity as you call it is invisible to Goetia's Clairvoyance. He has no influence on this Singularity."

"WHAT!?"

Ritsuka and Edmond were both out of their seats. "Then, what caused this Singularity!? Who!?"

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you."

"Why!?"

"Because then you'll know."

Ritsuka was gobsmacked. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Let me tell you something about this loop, Miss Fujimaru. Many people are under the impression that the loop starts in the year 2009 or maybe 2007."

"But… it's 1999."

"Exactly. In reality, the earliest possible starting point of the Persona branch in 1989. Yet, visiting loopers rarely if ever see the earlier section of the branch. And many of our most prominent loopers are not even born yet at this point of time – and even if they are, it is rare that they activate before 2007."

"So what you're saying is that there's some kind of in-loop divide" deduced Ritsuka. "The loopers in the early part take care of whatever's going on alone, because there's nobody else to help. And for some reason, you can't GET anyone to help either. Or maybe you refuse help? It's the kind of threat that becomes more dangerous the more people know about it."

"Excellent, Miss Fujimaru. You are correct. It is said that the Persona branch was the only one in Amala that escaped Yggdrasil's damage. In reality, it was damaged – it escaped the worst of the worst, but the earliest parts of the branch took the burnt, sparing the rest from instability."

Igor paused for a moment, letting Ritsuka and Edmond take this in, and the implications behind it. There was a threat in this loop that could crush it, and it was not Goetia. The whole deal with Tatsuzou and his criminal connections was only the tip of the iceberg.

"So, a threat in-loop that can crush and destabilize your whole branch. What else?"

"The most important thing – the rule of this city, if you will."

"Say it."

"The Rumour Curse."

Ritsuka could hear the capitalization.

"In your branch, the Nasuverse, belief affects magecraft as much as mystery does. In ours, it is just belief – with far more tangible and drastic results. In Sumaru city, every single rumour, once widespread enough, can become reality. People's perceptions alter the facts and change the writing in history books. From a urban legend shared between schoolchildren to an article on a tabloid, everything can change reality in ways that very few can perceive. It is a curse that the loopers of this city carry with them everywhere they go – I was told it accidentally crashed a Equestria loop, and they are considered a sanctuary loop."

Ritsuka decided not to share her own experiences with her fused Equestria loop. Still, she took Igor's warning to heart. Crashing the loop was the last thing she needed.

"*Thanks. We'll be careful."*

"*And one last thing. A boon, if you will."*

"*A boon?"*

"*You will see at the gates tomorrow – I hope you find it pleasant. Now, sleep well, Ritsuka Fujimaru. You have a long day ahead of you. And please, feel free to come back when you like. Our door is always open."*

It was only now that Ritsuka noticed the glowing blue door tucked in a corner of the room.

Ritsuka smiled, and it was an earnest thing. For his creepy visage and half-truths, Igor was meaning well.

Idly she wondered what this boon was.

"*Thanks, Igor. Goodnight."*

And thus true sleep took her.

…

As they promised to Igor, Ritsuka and Edmond said nothing to their fellow Chaldeans. Instead, after breakfast they gathered in Ritsuka and Mash' shared room and did something they should have done yesterday evening; contact Dr. Roman and Da Vinci.

"*A MAGIC MECH ARMY!?"*

"*Oh, I want to come with you, I want to see that!"*

"*Still, a magecraft robot army! Tatsuzou Sudou could easily take over the country with that!"*

"Yeah. That's why we're going in today to stop production. I just hope we make just enough noise to draw out the yellow suit guy. He probably knows something."

Dr. Roman let out a heavy sigh. *"We kept looking for him through the night but we had to call it quits… Either he knows how to conceal his presence or this singularity interferes with our sensors. Also… you said there are demons in the factory? Be extremely careful. There's no telling what you may encounter. Demons are still an unknown to us. Otherwise, I think it's a pretty solid plan? Heheh, strategy isn't my forte… Just be careful if the JOKER also shows up. You said he only kills when hired, but since there are personal stakes for him involved in this, he may show up in person and complicate the situation."*

Ritsuka should have thought of that herself. "You're right. If he shows up to the factory and we have to fight him it'll be a disaster."

However, Igor did mention a mysterious boon, so it make may their lives easier.

"Should we take him down? Or run?"

"We can't afford to run" said Bedivere. "They've already been attacked in one of their bases – by us. If we fail this second assault, they'll know what we're up to and boost their defenses accordingly. As servants we can easily beat them, but not without massive property damage. This is our only chance."

"Maybe we should have attacked in the middle of the night…?" asked Mash.

"I doubt it would made a difference… They'll probably expecting a middle night assault…"

"But we found them in the club in the afternoon!"

"That is true…"

"We're going now" announced Ritsuka, putting a stop on the debate. "It's our only chance. Doctor, keep an eye out. Let's go, guys."

A series of affirmations followed, and Ritsuka headed down to the lobby to check the bus schedule.

…

Unlike the previous day, Mash was doing far better in the bus today. She got caught up in a conversation with a tourist about their favourite novels, and by the time they got off the bus in Konan she was in a far better mood than she was at this morning. Ritsuka was just happy to see her happy.

Not too soon, the trio – and passenger – stood before the abandoned factory.

"Nobody…"

"It would look suspicious if there were suddenly guards."

Inwardly, Ritsuka wondered when she would see this boon.

"*Don't be so impatient, my accomplice. It seems our boon has already arrived."*

They were hit by a presence.

Well, "hit" was an overstatement. It was creeping and cold, but soothing and refreshing, like cold water from a fresh spring seeping into your clothes and cooling your skin – a much welcome relief. And yet there was something more to it – something that Ritsuka could not really put a name to.

"Oh, hello. Are you interested in the factory as well?"

It was a soft and friendly voice. The people from Chaldea turned to its source.

It was a young woman in her early twenties, with her brown hair in a pixie cut and warm brown eyes. Other than that, her most distinguishing features were the beauty mark under her lip and a compact mirror hanging from her neck.

She was also carrying something long and concealed across her back. Ritsuka had seen enough bows to recognize them when she saw them.

Bedivere was the first to recover, his chivalry coming through. "Hello, my lady. Our apologies for not noticing you. My name is Lucius. This is lady Mash and lady Ritsuka. May I ask for your name?"

The woman giggled, a thin blush on her cheeks. "My, such manners! You're like a knight from a fairy tale."

Bedivere blushed.

"Perhaps you should come assist at my work? You'll fit right in with the I."

Ritsuka blinked. She did not expect that.

"Your work?"

The woman smiled kindly. Yet behind its warmth there was something… sad in it. "I am Maki Sonomura. I'm a therapist assistant here at Konan."

And that was when she loosened her hold on her power. Bedivere, Ritsuka and Mash all took sharp breaths as the barely there cold water suddenly rose like a stream.

Maki's smile was knowing. She knew they sensed it. "My apologies for imposing, but perhaps I could be of assistance?"

That's one hell of a boon, Igor.

"Yes. Yes you could."

…

Chapter 4 section 4: Machinations
Area: Club Zodiac

The walls melted the moment he touched the door key, shimmered as if from a dream before the temperature rose beyond all recognition of what it was, and he held his breath in an instant, for this was a different kind of fire than the one that burned around his heart. It smelled of condemnation and damnation and dirty, dirty flesh and animal and other and through the melted walls he saw the galaxy and the rain and the hoofs, a thousand voices crying in hunger in an eternal cacophony-

Idly, he was reminded of yellowish-blue and the million ton tombstone hunting the fallen star.

He was the fallen star.

The mother/sister/killer/victim stepped out and brandished her blade, and yes he knew he was like her in more ways than one. Condemned by the brands on their flesh, the taint and yet-

"I still have something I need to do."

"Is that right?"

Her voice was dark, seductive, the kind that was aimed to the whole world as a challenge, her presence dark and overwhelming but he was already on the move, calling upon his flame as she laughed and laughed and *laughed.*

A few rooms away, Shiori Miyashiro was seriously reconsidering the decisions that led her to this point.

She was so, *so* close, yet her goal never seemed further away.

JOKER was right there. Tatsuya Sudou. The monster who dared to call himself a person, who murdered her little brother and those bastards at the force did nothing and *kept* doing nothing. He was the reason she joined the force herself. He was the reason she called her own number and put a hit on *herself*. She was waiting for ten years for this opportunity to finally arrest this… *criminal* and put him in jail properly instead of some mental institution like that's going to fucking help anyone and *fix* anything this was her chance because there would be *no other chance* than this and…

And she lost it. She was here in club Zodiac, during an ungodly hour of the night, having locked herself in with an insane killer that was *so much larger* than her, and the only one who even knew of her insane plan was a high-school girl with a lame knee.

Sudou was just laying on the couch, going through what appeared to be his second bottle of whiskey, a black katana vaguely aimed at her, hospital gown covered in blood. Some of it looked fresh. Shiori had a gun on her and they were at opposite ends of the room. It wasn't her service gun. That was returned to the station at the end of the day just as protocol dictated. In fact, a parole officer like her was not supposed to be issued a gun in the first place – it was only because of JOKER – because of *this man* – that all officers were issued one.

This gun was bought with the recommendation of a woman she met at the bar, who had a disturbing level of knowledge about firearms, and definitely didn't look like the type who'd be a military nut.

It was a G33 handgun, tiny enough to be hidden in her pocket, but it carried .375 SIG rounds and that meant it had nearly five times the power of the standard police firearm. The woman – whose name she really ought to get one of these days – gave her the bullets herself, saying that she hand-crafted them so they have… *specific properties.* Whatever that meant. They fired fine, and that was what mattered.

Yet even with all this, she somehow knew, at a deep subconscious level – she could not lay a scratch on this man.

Something shook.

An earthquake?

"Huh, so he's 'ere."

What?

Shiori looked at Sudou, gun still at the ready. "Who?"

Sudou took another ship of her drink. "Say, didya tell anyone you're comin'ere? 'Cause Paradox Boy ove'there's makin' a mess. Didn't 'xpect THAT lady to show up tho… He's in for one 'ell of a fight…"

He was slurring his words but that was not the problem. His speech was still clear enough. The issue was that what he was saying made no sense.

"Heheh, city's been getting' pretty fun… I got visitors yesterday. Ya know, in the hospital? First time in… ever. Heh. Ol' man neve' visited."

What!? Who in the world would visit Sudou?

"Newbies in town. Hadn't even heard of me. Heard 'ey stir som' trouble at the ol' factory this mornin'. Well, coul' be them. Coul' be Paradox Boy but, nah."

Shiori had enough of his riddles. "Who are you talking about? Who visited you and who is this Paradox Boy? Speak!"

"Patience, geeze. How the fuck didya become a cop lady with ya rushin' shit?"

"Rushing? *Rushing*!? I waited TEN YEARS for this!"

He looked at her blankly. After a moment he spoke. "Ah, ya got somethin' ta do withat kid a'the shrine? Let's see… his sis, pro'lly? Yeah, ya wait. He'll finish up in 'ere soon enough. Ya want ta hear this. Don't wanna repeat myself."

And he went back to his drinking.

Shiori never felt more lost. The pressure was overwhelming and now Sudou was straight up telling her that there were *more* people involved in this case. A mysterious group that visited him at the hospital and then possibly attacked the factory, and a boy who was… doing something in this building.

What in the world happened?

...

The same day, in the morning…

Area: Abandoned Factory

"…that's basically it."

Ritsuka and the others had already exchanged pleasantries with Miss Maki and gave her an abridged version of the events that lead them here – one that didn't include Chaldea, magecraft or the serial killer. Edmond had already confirmed that he could sense a great deal of power from her – as well as some strange aura – so using magecraft before her probably would not be that much of a risk. She certainly did not have the attitude or overall appearance of a typical magus, so they could trust her.

To a point.

After listening to their explanation, Miss Maki looked thoughtful. "So you went looking for the Triad base after you heard rumours that they were in the city, then you read online that someone saw weird cars in the area, you decided to sneak inside and you found a bunch of weird machines?"

She let out a sigh. "I've seen many odd things around here myself, including those cars… Unfortunately, the police hasn't done anything at all to help deal with them. It has been stressing out not only our patients, but everyone in the city. …And I happen to have some experience with risky situations, so I figured I could at least scout the area. But I suppose having a group in my back would help quite a lot!"

It was no servant contract but Ritsuka extended her hand. "So we have a deal, Miss Sonomura?"

"Heh, so official. Yes, we have a deal Miss Ritsuka. And please, just call me Maki. Unless you would prefer otherwise? Oh, I hope "miss Ritsuka" is alright with you…"

Ritsuka could not help but smile at how thoughtful this lady was. "Then it's Ritsuka, Maki."

Maki smiled in return. "I'm glad. Well then, shall we go?"

"Right ahead."

While Maki was not looking, Ritsuka pulled her communicator out.

"nw ally Maki Sonomura scn pls"

And so the trio from Chaldea along with their new ally walked into the factory.

…

Ritsuka did not expect it to be so empty. The entrance was little more than an empty hall connected to several corridors, with cracked faded tiles and peeling paint. There was a battered pin board handing there, tilt sideways with some old yellowed paper pinned there.

Ritsuka slowly walked up to it and read it. It was a factory shutdown notice.

She turned around and saw Maki unwrapping the package she was carrying.

"That's a really expensive bow there."

She smiled. "A gift from a friend with a lot of money."

"What about the arrows?"

"Don't worry about that."

Most people would probably raise an eyebrow at that but Ritsuka was not most people. If anything, worrying about ammo was weirder to her than having an unlimited supply.

"Edmond, where did you find the mechs?"

"Deeper in, floors down. I think the upper floors are the offices. There are many rooms I didn't check."

"Fair enough."

They let Maki lead the search, though they stayed close to her side, all checking for cameras and trying to keep their footsteps as silent as possible, to disturb as little as they could. True to her claim of prior experience, Maki was clearly familiar with walking through the empty and formerly sterile corridors of the factory. That said, Ritsuka had gotten good at reading expressions, and there was an underlying sense of unease coming from their new ally. Then again, Ritsuka didn't think Maki's previous experience stemmed from sight-seeing.

Suddenly she paused.

"Do you sen- feel that?"

Ritsuka, who kind of sucked at sensing things, shook her head. Maki took a long look at her.

"Demons."

It was Bedivere who spoke up. Whether it was because he sensed them or he deduced it, it elicited a reaction of surprise from Maki, before the tension left her shoulders. She nodded.

"However, something's wrong… It feels… familiar in a way but I can't quite put my mind to it… Can you fight them?"

They all nodded. "Got into some fights with them already."

"Good. I hope we can negotiate with them, I don't want to cause a ruckus…"

Ritsuka very much shared the sentiment. The less ruckus they caused the easier it would be to carry out their plan.

Maki nooked an arrow, and Bedivere opened the door.

They froze, for they were stared at with a thousand eyes through tiny holes that opened to the cosmos, tiny clouds of stardust and nebulas that could be held in your hand, ozone strong in the air and they melted on the ground with something that stuck to the ground the air and the walls alike, glistening under the artificial lights.

"ThE cursed sTAr Has AwakENEd vISiTors FrOm a mIlLIoN sTARs AwAy FroM ThIS Land YOuR lIGhT iS mAGNifiCeNT fOr THE MErchaNT-"

No negotiating with these ones. "Take them out!"

Ritsuka's order was enough to get her teammates to move, brandishing their weapons while Ritsuka had already fired a Grandr at the closest target.

It passed through it harmlessly.

"Darkness affinities won't work!" yelled Maki. "Use light affinities!"

Bedivere successfully cut one down and moved on to the next, but Ritsuka cursed as both Mash's shield and Maki's arrows passed through the monsters harmlessly.

Fuck, Ritsuka DID NOT DO light magecraft! She was the exact opposite of that!

Maki noticed it too. "Everyone, stand back!"

They all did and blue light danced around Maki, a form taking shape around her, machine and cloth bound together.

"Verdandi!"

What!?

A spirit emerged, a woman with a sphere in her hands or perhaps a jar, transparent in her presence, clad in green with something silver, something cold and hot at once enveloping coming through her like a stream or a breeze – one that turned into a gust as Maki called out her spell.

"Eternal White!"

Was it a snowstorm? A rain of light? Whatever it was, her spell took most of them out, and Maki went for something in her coat.

"What-"

"Extensive Knowledge of Firearms!"

It was a gun and she fired her shot and it was surprisingly quiet and that thing was *gone.*

Bedivere cut down the last ones.

They all stared at Maki.

She smiled. "Reaper Colt. A friend of mine managed to obtain a Colt OHWS for me and I… made a few modifications. I thought we'd need the silencer. And since it was never officially released, the police shouldn't be able to identify it! So that's a plus!"

They kept staring at her.

"I know it's illegal…"

It was. It was EXTREMELY illegal. And whoever the hell this friend of hers was, he ought to have some really deep pockets because who the hell gifts a gun from an unreleased line to someone in a country where firearms are extremely illegal!? WHY would they do that!?

"…I thought you were a therapist."

Her smile was *angelic.* "That's why I only ever mention my paintings."

To her defense, thought Ritsuka, *she knows Igor and he's bound to know nothing but weirdoes.*

She could hear Edmond laugh in her head.

"Um, sempai…"

Ritsuka turned to Mash and…

"Mash are you alright!? You're pale!"

She was. And she was trembling and her eyes were horrified.

"Sempai… what did we just fight…? I… I…"

Oh. They were *all* shaken up.

Wow, this is turning into a mess.

…

That night…

Area: Club Zodiac

The black blade of the woman that emerged danced, and he barely dodged out of the way. Even at his hands there was no way for a plain boken to withstand the crushing weight of a claymore, especially one magically enhanced as this.

This is a horrible room.

He was used to fighting in cramped places, even with crowds, but this room was tiny and filled with furniture. It was a staff break room, they had to use the bigger rooms for other just in the club. He would not be surprised if the fight brought down a wall.

Or perhaps the temperature would do it if he did not finish this fast enough. He could see the paint boiling. Not for the first time, he was extremely grateful for his Persona granting him complete immunity to fire and heat.

Not that it's gonna help with the toxic fumes…

Damn, he should have dropped by a pharmacy on his way home this morning. They tended to stock up weird stuff.

Really, the difference of experience between the swordwoman and him was laughable. And the joke was on him.

Flame burst from her hands and he took it head on, but it was merely a distraction her she *kicked* her shield into his chest, sharp end first, sending him slamming on the wall, and he barely rolled out of the strike that followed, straight into the black familiar that was following her. He swung at it but it melted around his blade and he used him momentum to stand up to his feet again.

What was that thing anyway? Some kind of goat plush toy?

The only good thing about the situation was that the portals had closed, so he did not have to deal with that additional headache.

The woman was laughing, her glasses glinting with the light of her flame.

"Fufufu, you're not half bad boy. Sooo much better than half the fools on the battlefield, they just swung their swords with a prayer and hoped for the best. But you? Oh, you're *radiant*. I would *looove* to feel that heat within me… I wonder how it burns… like pain… or like pleasure… maybe a punishment from God?"

Punishment from God…?

For the first time he took notice of her clothes.

Oh.

It was not a dress. It was a uniform. With a white cross on it. A design that while modified, he knew exactly where it came from.

"So you're not immune to fire."

She blinked, then her face morphed to a grimace for a split second before she laughed. "Is this your idea of flirting, boy? You need *work*."

"So I guess you're not immune to the sun either."

She stopped. "The su-"

"Blessing from the Beloved."

Even now, after so many times he used it, the name of this skill did something to his heart.

The world around him turned grayscale, and then the colours turned reversed. The watch on his wrist stopped ticking. The woman froze, the bubbles of the paint at the wall mid-burst, even the creepy familiar struggled before stopping just like everything else.

A mere Agidyne would not be enough to take her out. She was too strong. In that case-

He only had a few seconds. It would not be the full force of it but it would have to be enough.

"This is the embodiment of all of the sun's blessings and calamities…

"***NOVA KAISER!***"

…

Shiori blinked as she heard the sound of a key unlocking the door, and a stream of light came in as it opened, highlighting a shadow. The scent of smoke and something foul entered the room.

"Bou' fuckin time ya show up!" called Sudou. "Did tha' Templar chick slow ya down THA' much?"

The shadow said nothing. He simply walked in and Shiori blinked when she realized it was just a boy, a tall one, clad in red leathers and holding a sword? No, it was wooden.

"Introductions! Paradox Boy, that's a detective lady. Shiori Miyashiro, tol'me 'erself. Cop lady, that's Paradox Boy. Suou Tatsuya. Pre'y sure ya know 'ish brother."

And Shiori felt the ground leave her feet.

Miscellaneous 23

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – part 13
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

Chapter 4 section 5: Machinations
Area: Abandoned Factory

The enemy they fought, though annoying, was tiny and mostly spoke nonsense. Bedivere and Maki defeated them without much trouble. They looked odd but they were demons, so why…

Why was Mash freaking out so much?

"You are really bad at sensing mana, aren't you Ritsuka?" she heard Edmond in her head. *"There was something truly unnatural about these beings."*

"Huh?"

Mash was shaking, and Bedivere looked like he was trying his best not to show his own unease. Maki on the other hand had a confused but thoughtful look on her face, like she saw something familiar but could not place what was familiar about it and where she saw it before.

A low buzz came from her pocket and Ritsuka took a look at her communicator. Dr. Roman had scanned Maki. Good. At least an initial reading would be helpful.

Also…

"Ritsuka, you need to find out what that last enemy was immediately. Their presence almost short-circuited our scanners."

She frowned at the message that the doctor sent. That was bad but… really? They were tiny enough to hold in your hands.

However, those concerns were for later. Now she had to help Mash.

The girl was pale and shaking, her eyes wide.

"Mash…?"

"Sempai… I… I couldn't do anything… they were looking at me… but… they… were *looking*… And I… I could see them…"

What in the world…?

"Mash, look at *me*."

She did, and there were tears in her eyes. "It's not your fault. We don't know what we fought yet, but we'll find out. And you still tried to fight them. That was brave. And next time, we know how to beat them, okay? We'll find a way. Together."

Ritsuka did not really have a way to sugarcoat it and tell Mash that she was going to beat them all next time and that it was just a fumble – she knew better than to sugarcoat things anyway. But these were the most comforting words she could offer her right now.

Mash did not seem particularly reassured, but she seemed calmer, and she was no longer trembling. "Right. Thank you sempai. No matter what we face I will protect you."

"I know." She meant that.

Ritsuka turned to the others. "Everyone okay?"

Bedivere looked grave. "I have never seen anything like this before."

Well that was a bad sign. "Maki?"

"…"

"…Maki?"

"…Do you have a camera?"

Ritsuka blinked at the request. "A camera? Why?"

"I… I need to send a picture of that monster to a few friends of mine. They may figure out what it is. But… something felt so familiar… I'm sorry I can't help more…"

"It's fine, you took them down."

Inwardly, the gears in Ritsuka's mind were spinning. Maki clearly had a support network, other people who had experience with demons and most likely powers similar to her own. And speaking of said powers…

"Um, Maki? What did you just summon?"

Maki blinked in surprise. "You saw her?"

The trio from Chaldea exchanged glances before they all nodded their affirmation. Maki let out a small sigh before proceeding to explain.

"Most people cannot see them, though they have issues seeing demons too- this is my Persona, Verdandi."

"One of the Norns?" Ritsuka asked for confirmation. "You summoned a *god*?" Because if Maki could summon *Divine Spirits*…

"Not quite."

They all looked at her waiting for an explanation. "Gods indeed exist, but summoning them is almost impossible without a medium to possess." That so far coincided with what Ritsuka knew. "However, it is possible to summon shades of those gods in the form of demons."

"Shades. Of Divine Spirits. As demons."

When Ritsuka thought of "demon" she thought of her "Dark Young" form, so treating these creatures like random encounters was a bit of a change of pace for them. And now she was told you could make them out of *gods*?

Maki was unsurprised at her disbelief. "The gods themselves are not affected at all by the demons of themselves that get summoned. They are only shades that represent an aspect of the real deal after all. And in a way, that's what a Persona is."

"A Persona?" Igor *did* say they were in the Persona branch, but he never explained what that meant.

"All humans have gods within them. The shape of the gods is dependent on the shape of ourselves and our beliefs. They depend on us to exist, and they are the embodiment of what we believe, how we think and what we are. The Verdandi you saw is a shade of the goddess Verdandi that only I can call, because she is an aspect of Verdandi that I represent the best, and she represents me. That shade is my mirror. I am thou and thou art I."

Ritsuka took a moment to organize this information. "So basically this here is your own personal demon and you can use its abilities."

"That is a very basic way to put it, but yes. It is also an aspect of myself."

"Right, that. What does that mean?"

"Are you familiar with the term "persona"? Or Carl Jung?"

"Can't say I am."

Maki was now clearly in lecturing mode. "A persona is a psychological term coined by Carl Jung, which describes the different personalities people adapt in the different settings in their lives. The most simple example would be how you act around your friends versus how you act in front of your teachers, or how you act around your parents versus how you act around strangers. People adopt different personalities to deal with different conditions, and the purpose of those personalities is to conceal the true self that hides within, so that it is not damaged in some fashion. In other words, our personalities are multi-faceted, and we only show one facet – one mask – at the time depending on the situation. What you show to the world is you, but not the whole you. Likewise, people see what you show them, but they perceive it differently. Each and every person you meet views the mask you show them through different lens, and so there's at least on version of "Ritsuka" for each and every person who ever met you."

She took a deep breath to continue but something stopped her. "Um, do you understand so far?"

"…Yes, I do."

Ritsuka's primary class qualification as a servant was "Pretender". She knew a lot about different facets of you. More than most.

"Good. I can see it in your eyes that you're honest. Now, another term used in Jungian psychology is that of the Collective Unconsciousness. How to phrase it… It is the bedrock of our perceptions as humans. The ocean from which our minds are born."

"…"

"…Let's… explain it another time. …If that's alright with you…"

Ritsuka shook her head. She got the answers she needed right now, philosophy could wait. "It is. Let's get moving guys. We have some robots to shut down."

…

That night, Club Zodiac

"Long time no see, ya fuckin' brat. Did tha' Templar cunt slow ya down THAT' much?"

Sudou's greeting confirmed Tatsuya's suspicions and fears. It was almost a relief to see a familiar face, if anything he had an answer he knew what to do with. Aside from that though…

He glanced at the woman on the side. Miyashiro Shiori. A coworker of his brother.

Yoshizaka had called him barely an hour ago, telling him about the woman who showed up at the club with the intention of capturing the JOKER by using herself as bait.

Women were sharp. Yoshizaka even more so. She recognized something was off with him from the very beginning. That he wasn't "he". Well, he could not pretend to be the Suou Tatsuya she knows anyway. The "him" on this side is friends with Yoshizaka, first name basis and all.

But he knew the Yoshizaka on the other side well enough to know she is reliable. So they talked. Put some things together. She told him about the murders when he asked about rumours. He told her the police would not be able to deal with them. Eventually they put some things together.

The evening before, while he was struggling *not* to let his consciousness take over this body, his brother – the one on This Side – practically threw the door to their apartment several hours after he was supposed to be done from work, boiling in frustration that was for once *not* directed at him.

No, it was instead directed towards all his coworkers and the force and the increasing number of victims and how the higher-ups kept making them do irrelevant things instead of actually investigating.

His brother was always dead serious about law and order, which is the entire reason Tatsuya had a nearly spotless attendance record despite his reputation, why his motorcycle was registered and why generally went out of his way to keep his hands and record as clean as possible up until recently. Not that he cared, but it was less trouble for everyone, him included.

Not that himself on this side had as much of a concern as he did, but at least the motorcycle was registered with a learner's permit.

But despite his brother being serious about the law, he was never terribly *passionate* about it. He had never seen him return from work *this* frustrated. Never.

So Tatsuya left, ignoring his brother's protests with practiced ease, and automatically swallowed the familiar resentment when neither of his parents voiced anything at all.

And he went to the shrine. He talked to a familiar-looking hag there. She was pretty sweet.

And on his way back, he saw Yoshizaka. Immediately, she could tell. So they talked.

That was two nights ago.

Miyashiro was frozen in the corner, her gun at the ready yet not aiming. From that model… It would help against some of the weaker demons and it would blow most people to pieces if the ammo was of the same standard as the gun, but it would be of no help against a Persona user.

"Get out of here."

"Wha-"

"Yoshizaka called me. You can't arrest him. Leave. And don't call my brother."

"He's in illegal possession-"

Reflex took over as he grabbed the woman just in time to avoid a knife that would bury itself in her skull.

"-weapons. I know. That law won't matter much soon anyway."

"What does that mean?"

"Leave, now."

And he attacked Sudou.

…

Morning, Abandoned Factory

As they slowly made their way to the lower levels, Ritsuka found that the other demons they found at the factory were considerably more "normal" than the nonsensical orbs they fought. At the same time however they proved Maki's words from earlier true.

Especially when they ran into one that looked *exactly* like the "Real Deal Nobunaga", except clad in traditional armor and wielding a musket. Ritsuka had seen him enough in the loops to recognize him, but seeing him *here* was… quite the thing. She wondered how Nobu would react if she saw him. This version of "Tenmau" looked nowhere near as intimidating as the crimson Demon King of Myriad Heavens.

The demons here were also considerably tougher than the ones they found in the forest, though nothing that their party could not handle. Maki's assistance had proven valuable – her Persona was loaded with all sorts of healing spells up to and including Mediarahan, which was capable of curing anything short of status effects, and she appeared to have a near endless amount of energy to back her up. Ritsuka always appreciated having a support healer at her side.

Then as they made their way lower… voices.

"Looks like we're near the facility."

Ritsuka nodded. "So, how are we going to do this? I can sneak inside with no problem, but if they notice you guys…"

Maki frowned, but said nothing.

"She must have an ace in the hole she doesn't want us to know about."

Ritsuka agreed with Edmond's conversation but did not comment on it. Servants who withheld their abilities were not *always* bad news. And even though Maki was no servant, she had just met them.

Ritsuka pulled out Robin's May King, adding a bit of a light show to pretend it was a bit of displacement magecraft and not a Pocket.

"I'm going in. The rest of you, wait here."

She threw the May King over her shoulders, discreetly opened the doors, and headed in.

[Persona 3]
How not to date girls
Author: Kaoupa

As she, Mitsuru, Fuuka, and Aigis all sat in the chairs outside the room for surgery, Yukari reflected that she may have become a little too used to having her friends in the hospital.

Well... I guess it's not like Makoto's going to die, though, right?

It's just a full body cast.

Well... The memories of the full body cast and how it was obtained did make her wince slightly.

It was a Null Loop, meaning Makoto had to give himself up to prevent the Fall (and an Eiken trip for everyone), and-

"You can see him now."

Yukari forgot what she had been thinking and got up as the door opened, with the nurse stepping aside as they entered.

"Er, hey..." She said awkwardly as the four girls walked into the room where Makoto was currently immobilized.

He gave them a flat look.

"I'd ask how you feel, but I think I know what the answer is..." Fuuka awkwardly noted.

"Makoto-san. Do you require any food or drink? Hospitals are unlikely to let outside foodstuffs in." Aigis questioned.

"No, thank you..." Makoto muttered. He opened his mouth.

Seeing that roughly half his teeth were missing made Yukari (and the other three girls) wince again.

"I am aware there is nothing we can do at the moment, but would you like to request a transfer? I could place you in my family's care - I can explain the situation to my father and Kikuno." Mitsuru said.

"...if I die in my sleep because of them, I'm going to slap you the next time we're both Awake."

Mitsuru, seeing the response as the "please do that" it was meant as in subtext, nodded and left the room as the other three girls sat down.

"Sorry - well, I just - wish we'd all woken up a bit sooner." Fuuka sighed.

"Indeed. Makoto-san does not deserve what our non-looping selves did to Minato-san." Aigis concurred.

"Yeah." Yukari shook her head sadly. "But seriously, we have run into way too many versions of you and the other Wilds Cards that think it's a good idea to date all of us girls without *telling* any of us..."

Makoto gave the three girls a rather dead look, then spoke as he gestured with his head at his body cast. "You're telling *me?"*

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – parts 14 to 17
Author: me

Chapter 4 section 5: Machinations
Area: Abandoned Factory

It was a good thing that Ritsuka opted for stealth because this place was packed. There were plenty of goons in traditional Chinese garb walking around with knives and guns in their hands, trying to look big and haughty. However, when they thought nobody was looking, they would glance at the other guards of this place: the armed to the tooth military personnel, carrying heavy rifles and wearing either formal uniforms or what looked like the army version of riot gear. Ritsuka took note of the more "casually" dressed ones – they were wearing some pretty distinct red berets as part of their uniform.

As quietly as she could – which was extremely quiet, she *was* a trained ninja after all – she treaded deeper in the facility, using the many crate boxes and containers to mask any potential hint she could give away that indicated her presence.

Much to her frustration, the crates were arranged like a labyrinth, forcing her to weave through the thin trails they followed or climb on top of them. Robin's cloak was invaluable

There they were. The mechas.

Ritsuka knew that her standards were generally skewed by Olympus, but even so these were disappointingly small. Like Edmond said, they were around three meters in height and had a design which looked largely inspired by Star Wars, except the more cyberpunk version of them. A small chamber for one pilot and a bipedal design with "hands" to hold weapons. Well, even *more* weapons. Each and every available spot on that thing's armor was absolutely covered with guns of several calibers, the ammunition undoubtedly hidden in the bulky armor. All in all, pretty standard stuff.

Except for *that* weapon.

"*Why a giant sword of all things?"* It was a oversized Japanese katana which in Ritsuka's opinion looked pretty out of place, though it definitely served as a symbol of nationalism if nothing else. She ended up in GUDAGUDA enough times to know what absurdly advanced Imperial Army magitech looked like.

Actually, this could be trouble.

"*There's something off with that sword, Ritsuka…"*

The girl frowned at her partner's worried tone. As usual, she could not sense much of anything, but if *Edmond* got a bad feeling out of it, then it was better she took his advice to heart and exercised caution.

"*Let's find a way to disable that. Then we'll keep looking."*

Quiet as the air itself, Ritsuka made her way behind the bulky mech and pulled a taser specifically designed by Tesla many loops ago. The result of one of his and Edison's many competitions, the "Teslaser" was designed, depending on the setting, to unleash attacks that ranged from merely functioning like a typical taser to its best mini-sized imitation of the infamous death ray. Not that Ritsuka ever tested that one – she never got the chance to.

Now however she needed it for Tesla most favourite of functions; short-circuiting other machines.

She found one promising-looking gap in the plating, and let the device do its work. A few moments later, there was a smell of smoke rising from the mech – a sure indication that it was successfully fried.

Edmond was not as happy.

"*You idiot! Now they'll smell it!"*

Shit. Ritsuka didn't usually have to worry about things like that!

"*Let's move quickly."*

"*Let's."*

After that Ritsuka was low-key jogging through the facility, eternally grateful for Robin's Noble Phantasm as otherwise she would have been heard. For a while it did not look like anyone noticed the smell, but if she took too long…

"*We should have come in the middle of the night. This whole "destroy all equipment" thing would be so much easier if there was no stealth involved."*

"*True, but thanks to you getting a good night's sleep, we now have access to Igor and a support network. By your standards, it was a remarkably good night."*

"*True enough."*

She soon ran into some other mechs too, and she stood for a moment contemplating before deciding to leave them alone. She knew they could handle them if they attacked later. The important part was to find the production units and the computers.

Which she did.

Hoo boy, these were ANCIENT. Um, they were mounted in the wall even, and connected with way too many wires… She was pretty sure just cutting the wires wasn't going to be an issue here, they were just going to buy new ones… there were also some old PCs with BOX SCREENS of all things and a couple of the blockiest laptops she had ever seen. She didn't know there were touch screens back- wait, there was no touch screen. But- hold on, was that red thing in the middle of the keyboard *a direction button*? Like a joystick? *Wild*. Ritsuka had been in many eras but this was pretty high in her lists of "times I felt very misplaced". Laptops with in-build joysticks because touch screens weren't a thing yet. Wow.

And flop disks. She could not forget the flop disks.

The computers were all connected to the production lanes, which seemed to have repurposed from whatever this place used to manufacture. Along the old machinery, almost like a parasite or a chimera, new machines had been added. Far newer with cylindrical designs and many limbs and just as many carefully labeled wires, unclear in what their exact purpose was supposed to be, carrying the same cyberpunk feeling and the GUDAGUDA magitech aesthetic as the mechs from before. Undoubtedly, they had the same designer. In many of the opened crates, she could see various guns, and a further back a small group of men were welding parts of the guns with the armor of the mech they were working on. A man standing by the computers was inspecting the process.

Well then. She would have to steal everything that wasn't nailed down. Then blow up everything.

Edmond let out a sigh at the risk but otherwise took it in stride. Typical Ritsuka.

Honestly, it was kind of hilarious to watch. Ritsuka started with all the stray floppy sticks, then stole all the extra wires just for the heck of it, went through the crates and took enough guns to make Koyanskaya jealous, took about three or four laptops, and planted several tiny explosives that she had gathered over the loops – courtesy of several servants including Nobunaga, Edison, Kiritsugu, and Nursery Rhyme in one memorable case – and fled before anyone knew what's going on, disabling a few extra robots in the process.

Just as she slipped out of the facility and closed the door behind her, she heard someone call out in Chinese.

"有人吸烟吗？"

Stealth was fun.

She removed the May King to the curious faces of her team. "I planted about twenty or so mini bombs in there. Let's get out of here."

They made it out of the factory and were greeted with a small tremor. Just like the movies.

It was followed by a much louder tremor in her stomach that everyone heard.

"Any ideas for where we can eat, Maki?"

"Sure thing! Just let me call some friends to see if they're around…"

Ritsuka counted today as a success. And the day had barely started.

…

Chapter 5 section 1: Rumourmonger 2
Area: Aoba

Maki spent the next few minutes making phone-calls to her various friends, much to the fascination of her audience. Ritsuka could only catch one half of the conversation, but from what she figured out, some of them would be coming to town in a few days, another was too busy with something, and the third was still at work. So that left them with one friend left, which they were heading to meet right now.

"We're here!"

"Here" was a small office tucked among the many other stores in Aoba's main shopping district, the interior hidden with typical office window blinds. An elegant bronze sign writing "Kuzunoha" in English characters decorated the entrance, repeating the name with Kanji and the note "Detective Agency".

Maki stepped to the door without hesitation, and Ritsuka followed suit.

"Tamaki! We're here!"

"Hey, Maki!"

The only detective agency Ritsuka had been in before was Ryouma and Oryou's, so seeing this place was a bit of a whiplash. The Sakamoto detective agency could best be described as organized chaos, complete with a conspiracy board, a LOT of paperwork, a lot of frog memorabilia and a bunch of boxes and knick-knacks meant for Oryou's shop, all set in strange mix of a Bakumatsu and mid 20th century style that Ryouma favoured. In comparison, the Kuzunoha detective agency felt sterile. The walls and lights were white, and one wall was covered with an oak bookcase filled to the brim with files. The heavy oak desk also had a computer and several organized stacks of paper. The floor in the middle was lower than the rest in a style that just screamed 80's, complete with some comfy leather sofas and a desk with some typical magazines always found in waiting areas. The only thing of note was the absolutely massive gold lucky cat statue tucked in the corner. Well, probably not actual gold, but still. It was so tacky that it looked like it was compensating for the sterility of the room.

She also wasn't expecting the mechanized voice. *"Tip please."*

She decided to humour it and threw in some yen.

"…*that's all you got?"*

"What?"

"*Thank you!"*

…That was weird.

"Do you like our lucky cat?"

"Never seen one like it before…"

She chuckled. "It's pretty unique…" Was that nervousness? Weird.

"Oh, I didn't introduce myself! Uchida Tamaki, I'm an intern here." The young woman offered her hand in a handshake and the Chaldean mage accepted it.

"Fujimaru Ritsuka. Nice to meet you."

Tamaki was a fairly pretty woman. Her brown hair was cut short but instead of Maki's pixie cut hers was more layered and flared out. She was wearing a brown pinstripe suit that looked very professional but wasn't exactly flattering, and she had a straight pose Ritsuka usually saw in sword users.

So she can fight too… "Edmond, can you sense anything from her?"

"*Not really… However, something's off about that statue… and the back of the office."*

Statue and back of the office. Noted.

While she was observing her, Tamaki exchanged introductions with the rest of the squad.

"Where's the detective?"

"Out for lunch, he should be back in an hour or so."

"That's a shame, I would love to introduce him too."

"Maybe another day? Or a bit later? We're always open!"

"Heheh, that's true! What about Tadashi? Is he still missing?"

Missing?

"Eh, he's a cockroach, he'll be fine" said Tamaki, entirely unconcerned.

"You're dating him though…"

Ritsuka was not the only one sweatdropping at this exchange.

"So, shall we get going? I know a great sushi place in Regendai!" She turned towards Ritsuka and company and winked. "I'll show you newbies some good tips about this city too!"

Now, Ritsuka was very interested.

"*This could be useful"* said Edmond in the privacy of their head. *"So far this city has been nothing but mysteries, so any kind of tip on would be a precious boon."*

Ritsuka agreed. *"Igor really did us a solid."*

"*We'll see how much of "a solid" he offered once we hear what this Uchida woman has to offer."*

Ritsuka did not disagree.

Fortunately the way to Regendai was pretty short, even with the buss – damn this city really needed a metro. From what Dr. Roman had told them, this was the city center and it had a hill at the center. It certainly looked like no city center that Ritsuka had ever seen. A lone island in the middle of the river that crossed through Sumaru, Regendai was dominated by greenery. The residential area was relatively small, there was a single school and the shopping district where they were headed was similarly contained. They passed by a large park under construction on the way too.

"*I sense strange energy coming from that hill, my accomplice…"*

That was concerning. However, Ritsuka barely had any time to ponder on it before she and the others were ushered in a sushi bar.

"WELCOME!" came a mighty roar from behind the counter. They all turned to see a middle-aged man in a traditional chef's kimono, complete with a towel wrapped around his forehead to catch his sweat. "First time customers? Thanks for coming! Gatten sushi is known for the fresh fish and the incredibly low prices! Come eat as much as you want!"

After the overly aggressive welcome, Ritsuka took in the store. The interior was uber-traditional, and while the tatami mats were mostly empty, the bar was full of businessmen in suits. There was also a large fish tank right by the door.

The two locals of the group however did not go to sit anywhere at all. "Hey, Chunky!"

"Wha-" *Chunky!?*

"Oh! Tamaki-san and Maki-san! It's been a while! And who are these here? New pals or clients?"

Ritsuka blinked, completely taken off-guard by the development. The man who responded was massive, but his face was youthful and he was excited. *Still, calling someone Chunky is so rude…* Was it a high school nickname or something? Those tended to be mean.

"A bit of both" replied Tamaki. "Introductions, everyone! This is Kenta Yokouchi, he was in our year back in St. Hermellin High. He's a door-to-door salesman now. Chunky, these here are Ritsuka, Mash, and Sir Lucius."

Bedivere blushed. "Just Lucius is fine, my lady."

The man – Yokouchi – laughed. "That's why she's calling you "Sir", isn't it. Come on" he gestured to the tatami mats "let's sit. Kenkichi-san! All their orders on me!"

"You don't have to…" stammered Mash.

"Nonsense, you guys are Maki and Tamaki's friends, right? Makes you fine in my book!"

"Um… thank you very much!"

Even after so many loops, Ritsuka could not deny the warm feeling in her chest. Such a warm welcome, and by completely new people nonetheless. Even if the mean nickname made

things a bit awkward.

"So…" started Yokouchi after everyone had placed their orders. Ritsuka was surprised to see a handful of vegan options in the otherwise very traditional menu.

"You guys have some pretty strong auras but you aren't Persona users. What's your deal?"

Ritsuka's jaw dropped, as did the jaws of all her companions.

Maki chuckled. "Chunky doesn't look like much, but nobody's as good as sensing Persona and demon auras as he is."

"*He's really good at concealing it too"* commented Edmond in her head. *"His aura reminds me of Beast III/L, though only on a surface level."*

Beast III/L? Ritsuka was alarmed for a moment but then she remembered Maki's speech from earlier that day. *"Maybe he has a Persona based on Kama or Mara?"*

"*Sounds like the most likely scenario."*

He certainly did not look the part, but then again Maki did not look like she was housing Verdandi and carrying highly illegal firearms either.

While Ritsuka was discussing with the Count, Maki was explaining the situation to Yokouchi.

"So you guys aren't Persona users but you got caught up in this anyway? Are you sure you're just tourists?"

"I knew about demons for quite a while" said Bedivere "but it was quite unexpected that we ran into them here. We ran into Lady Maki by chance. Lady Ritsuka has a habit of trying to solve everyone's problems, so it falls to us to keep her safe and help her in turn. I admit however that today was the first time we hear of Personas. We have abilities ourselves, but nothing like this."

And the question about them being real tourists was artfully dodged, with centuries of practice by Sir Bedivere.

"*It's not common to see this side of him out of the Camelot Singularity"* noted Edmond. Ritsuka silently agreed. In a time – or a branch in this case – where everyone would question them, his ability to stay under the radar was invaluable.

"Maki-san? Tamaki-san?"

The two ladies turned to Ritsuka.

"Why exactly have you brought us here?"

"Cutting to the chase, huh?" said Kenta. "It's to show you the ropes about rumourmongers, right?"

"That's right" confirmed the detective. "Rumours are one of the most important parts of any investigation, as there is always a kernel of truth in them. And there's no better place to get them but from rumourmongers, like Chunky here!"

"Rumours are handy in sales" said Yokouchi "and here me and the other guys on the bar are sharing rumours we hear on the job. I go from door to door, so I always meet plenty of housewifes willing to gossip. Little kids never hold back their tongues either! And of course, you hear all sorts of things at restaurants. Like that man there at the corner?"

Chunky did not point but he did not have to. It was an older man in an overly expensive and very new three piece suit that did not really compliment him, practically radiating smugness as he stuffed his face with sushi.

"His boss was killed by the JOKER a few weeks back, and this guy got a promotion. Now his company CEO. He used to complain about his boss all the time, next thing he marches in here with this new suit and a newspaper."

It was not hard at all to piece together the hints. Everyone on the table stiffened.

Yokouchi gave them a few moments for the information to sink in, eating a few pieces of his sushi. The others imitated him.

"There are quite a few of us rumourmongers around the city. Like Toku-san, he used to sleep at Honmaru park before it went under construction. Or Chikarin, from the Seven Sisters' school newspaper."

Ritsuka was starting to see how this segment of the Persona branch was so unstable. With everyone so interested in rumours that spreading them gave you a *title*, no wonder that a curse that makes them all come true was causing such chaos. It was the perfect breeding ground.

"*And do not forget that this curse crashed an Equestria loop once"* reminded her Edmond.

"We heard about the factory from a website…" said Mash.

"Hm…"

"Baofu's, right?" asked Tamaki. "I hear he has been offline for a while."

Baofu? That doesn't sound Japanese. Ritsuka filed that away for later.

"Here's how the "system" works" said Yokouchi. "You tell us a rumour and we tell you one in return. Give and take you know? And that's how you spread them across the city. The better the information you give me the better information we get to give you."

"*So you pay them for their services."*

"Does that make sense?"

Nods all around.

"Good! Glad we understand each other. Let's get down to business; what do you want to know?"

Ritsuka fell deep in thought. Give information and get information in exchange, huh?

"*We can ask about the mysterious man at the club!"*suggested Mash. *"Maybe he has a lead!"*

"*Great idea, Mash! Why don't you tell him? Just keep everything we heard from the JOKER a secret."*

Mash blushed. *"Um… Alright! I'll do my best, senpai!"* She cleared her throat.

"You have something good for me, Mash-san?"

"I-I think so! You have heard that there is a Triads base in Club Zodiac, correct? We saw a strange man in a yellow suit spying on them yesterday. He has abilities too, so we think he may be a Persona user or someone like us."

Yokouchi gave an appreciative hum. "Sounds mysterious! Let me give you something mysterious in return. Let's see…"

Ritsuka fidgeted with anticipation. She vaguely heard Edmond telling her not to get her hopes too high, but she ignored it.

"Right! There's an invisible shop in this mall."

Ritsuka blinked.

"Hold your horses. It's an antique shop called Time Castle, but here's the mysterious part; it appeared only a few months ago, but everyone acts like it's been there forever. Like it showed up in a flash and suddenly everyone already knew it. It has a pretty strange aura too. People who go inside leave, but over time they leave less and less… How does that sound?"

"…A mysterious aura?"

"Yep. Certified by yours truly. I haven't sensed anything similar since… never mind."

From the corner of her eye Ritsuka saw Maki flinch a little, with Tamaki patting her leg. Interesting.

"I haven't gone inside though. You guys don't have Personas but you don't need them I guess. You don't use the Demon Summoning Program either-"

There was a *program?*

"-that's pretty rare."

"Uhh, yeah…" Did he know about mages? It certainly looked like it.

"So no information about the yellow man…" said Mash downcast.

"Sorry, but housewifes don't really gossip about things like that." Made sense. "Still, people like us tend to gather in mysterious places, so who knows? Maybe you'll hear something there."

Mash bowed gratefully, with Ritsuka and Bedivere following her lead. "Thank you very much, Yokouchi-san!"

"Hey, no need to thank me, you told me some interesting stuff! A deal's a deal! Now, enough with the serious talk, let's eat!"

The rest of the noon passed pleasantly, with the former classmates catching up and Mash asking all sorts of questions about their lives. Soon that shifted into what kind of books everyone liked watching performances in general. No matter the loop, Ritsuka always loved watching Mash come out of her shell. Bedivere gave her an empathetic smile. He understood it too.

As he promised, Yokouchi paid for everyone, and shortly afterwards they all got up to leave.

A sudden thought struck Ritsuka.

"By the way, Yokouchi-san?"

"Yes?"

"What IS your Persona?"

He chuckled a little. "Tower Arcana, Mara. That seductive aura makes for seductive offers, you know?"

That was… unconventional. Ritsuka seriously wondered what Kama would say if she heard that.

"Hope to see you guys soon!"

The waved their goodbyes in return, and Ritsuka left feeling lighter.

Time to chase their next lead.

…

Chapter 5 section 2: Rumourmonger 2
Area: Regendai

Finding the Time Castle, as the shop was called, was surprisingly difficult. There were several shops in the mall, and after a while the signs seemed to blur together. True, Yokouchi may have mentioned the shop having a unique aura, but Ritsuka has always been trash at sensing them and this was not going to change anytime soon.

Fortunately, the mall was not quite that big.

"Senpai, look! There it is!"

Ritsuka looked to where Mash was pointing. It definitely looked like an antique shop. Unlike most other places with their modern fronts, this one was dressed in wood to evoke this old-timey aesthetic that it advertized. A red sign with the shop's name and an embedded clock was hanging in front of the entrance.

Their small group gathered in front of the shop.

"It really does have an unpleasant aura…" commented Mash, looking disturbed. "Sempai… it reminds me of those monsters we fought…"

"Huh?"

Ritsuka was puzzled, and the agreeing gestures from Bedivere and Maki only increased her confusion. *"The entities we battled were truly vile, my accomplice. And while it is not all that similar, the aura from this shop is indeed reminiscent of the aura of the beings at the factory."*

"*Well you know that I can't sense crap"* said Ritsuka. Still, even *Edmond* was spooked? Ritsuka only thought that those demons really weird. They were *tiny*.

"It sounds pretty bad" said Tamaki. "I'd rather we all get more prepared before we enter. I don't have my COMP with me-"

Her what-

"Oh? So you are uncertain of your purchase?"

Everyone froze.

At the entrance of the shop stood a stranger. A man that looked young and older at once, with long white hair, an overly pale complexion, a long red coat, and most strangely of all, a pocket watch worn as a monocle. He examined each of them.

Bedivere out of sheer force of manners stepped forward first. "Greetings-"

"I see… existences like you are most unusual, yet fascinating. You seek to defy for Fate yet you are defined by what has passed… Regardless of their nature, humans are veritably pitiful beings…"

What. The actual. Fuck.

"I assure you that my shop if free for all to enter, if you wish to browse."

Ritsuka really wished she texted Dr. Roman to get a reading off this shop. *"It would not work"* said Edmond. *"The presence of the creatures earlier blocked Chaldea's sensors."*

"We-we were just window shopping" stammered Mash. "I-I'm… *really* sorry to have bothered you… sir…"

The shop owner regarded them with the same flat yet piercing expression. "We should leave…" said Maki.

"If you are truly interested in the unusual and bizarre, may I suggest some urban exploring?"

"Huh?"

That was *not* where Ritsuka was expecting this conversation to turn. The shop owner had a thin smile on his lips. Somehow that was more unnerving than his expression before.

"You hear many fascinating takes about the underground. To my understanding the construction of the subway system has unearthed many of them. Though maybe something more… secured would be a safer start?"

"…Thank you for your tip, sir." Ritsuka was not sure what else to tell the man.

"The gears of time inevitable turn forward. Be certain not to waste it." And with that he returned to his shop.

The party just stared after him for a few moments, then slowly walked away.

A few shops later Tamaki exploded. "What the hell was that!? Chunky's rumour was right on the money, there's NOTHING normal about this!"

Maki nodded with a downcast expression. "What an unnerving man…"

"However we have a new lead now."

Everyone turned to Bedivere. "What do you mean?"

"He advised us to head underground" he replied. "It may be a trap of some kind or a simple trick, but we have heard – or rather read – several tales about the subway system construction site. In addition, the criminals we encountered operated from a seemingly abandoned factory. It would not be a stretch to assume that they are using other places that the public cannot access as a means of carrying their operations."

"You have a point" said Maki. "They have to get the materials into the factory somehow…"

"What were they making in that factory anyway" asked Tamaki "you never told me."

"Mechas."

"Mechas? *Robots*!?"

"Yup."

"Wha- MAKI! Mention that sooner! Why didn't you call me!?"

"I was just supposed to scout the place!"

"Why, what did you do?"

"Ritsuka set a few explosives apparently."

"And stole everything that wasn't nailed down…" added Mash with a tired look of resignation.

Tamaki gawked at Ritsuka's smugness, Mash's resignation, Bedivere's "I've seen crazier but not by much", and Maki's "what can you do" looks.

"And you think they won't *notice*?"

"Oh, no" said Ritsuka. "They've definitely noticed."

…

Abandoned Factory

"How in the world did this happen!? Are all of you blind and deaf buffoons!? Maybe your noses are stuffed from your stupidity? And YOU! You are the inspector! How didn't YOU notice that anything was off!? This is a grave security breach!"

The Triad goons in the room could barely catch half of what was said at best, but they did not really need a translation either. The military man's tone of voice was more than enough to relay your message.

"I will SPEAK to your le-grlghh!"

In mid rant he was overcome by a terrible coughing fit, the cold sweat that was always covering his body even more prominent.

Damn disease…

It was fine. It would be fine. If anything their leader promised him to fix this, as long as he provided the machines. So for some… foreign vermin to ruin everything with their idiocy! It was… *It was…!*

Another coughing fit, that left him heaving. He loathed how weak they made him. Disgusted him to his core.

"General Sugawara."

He snapped to attention – not the military one, but rather of surprise. The man who entered had a prominent Taiwanese accent, and a teasing tone in his voice. A different kind of disgust swirled in his gut.

"Yung Pao."

The assassin smiled, making his scar twitch in his face. He was not imagining the air of smugness radiating from his ugly mug. Ugh, why did Tatsuzou have to rely on him of all people?

"Do not get upset, you get ill. We take care of culprit."

He can't even speak Japanese properly. Still, the Triad assassin was a long term associate. He could not be impolite with him. "How exactly will you find the culprits."

The man's smile got even wider. "We have new associates."

Suddenly there was a second figure. Only years in the military prevented Sugawara from flinching in surprise. Where did he come from?

He discarded those thoughts to take the stranger in. His traditional garb was even more obnoxious than Yung Pao's, leaving his tattoos extremely prominent. His hair was everything but subtle either. Such a glaring appearance, really…

But I have no idea how long he was standing there.

"'Sup! Sugawara, right? Call me Assassin. I'll be'in ya care! No sweats, I'll fin' yer vermins for ya. Can pick 'em trail no probs."

He completed his statement with a wink.

We're doomed.

…

Area: ?

"Man, the others are going to lose their minds when they see you! How long it's been?"

"Almost four years by now… Seriously, how about you come too? Nanjo can easily pay for both our tickets."

"Ugh, you know I'm here on a freaking scholarship, can't risk that!"

"Heh, you're right. But don't spoil the surprise!"

"No worries dude, I won't. But take a picture, would you? I want to see their faces!"

"When I walk in?"

"Of COURSE when you walk in!"

"Consider it done."

"Ha, that's why you're the best, man!"

The two exhanged a fist bump, then a long hug.

"Don't do anything too crazy!"

"That's Nanjo's line."

"Hey!"

They laughed.

"Seriously though, be careful. I keep up with the news, it sounds like a shitshow!"

"That's why I'm going."

"Catch up to ya later then?"

"Sure thing. You have my email."

"What happened to phones?"

"The bills."

"Oh, right…"

A taxi drove in, slowing in front of the two young men. The driver came out to open the back, and the young man threw his travelling bag inside.

For the last time he waved back at his friend, knowing they would not see each other for a while.

"*So? Excited?"*

"*Excited!? It has been a long time since I last gazed upon the land only the rising sun! It better be as glorious as the one upon my lands!"*

The young man smiled.

"*I can think of a few spots. After we take care of things."*

He has not spoken to Igor in a while after all.

…

Hirasaka

"Oh! You'll turn in already?"

"Not quite" said Ritsuka to Maki's inquiry. "We're mostly going to organize our stuff, if we're planning on walking through guarded tunnels tomorrow."

Tamaki nodded approvingly. "Always take advantage of time if you have it. Being slothful in your preparations is a huge no-go. I'm talking from experience! And we both have jobs to get back to."

"I took today off though?"

"Well, *I* didn't! And I need to update the detective!"

"Don't worry, he's trustworthy" said Maki at the alarmed looks crossing the Chaldea group's faces.

"If you say so…"

"Trust me, he's seen all kinds of nonsense. He's a demon summoner on the side, you see!"

What's UP with this branch. Is the rest of Persona like this?

They all waved their goodbyes, and the Chaldea trio headed to their hotel.

"So, what are we going to do next, senpai?"

"Next… we are going to see Dr. Roman's readings on Maki."

…

Late evening, Konan

Shiori Miyashiro straightened her suit jacket, then looked at herself in the mirror. Good. Her gun was concealed. The calling card was on her person, her police badge, I.D., card and wallet all in their respective places. Her phone was fully charged, and her own number was on the quick dial.

It's finally time, Tatsuya Sudou. You won't get away lightly THIS time. I promise.

She would do it. She would catch him in the act. She would prove that he deserved to be behind a prison's bars, that he deserved to be six feet under, that he deserved to be *ash*. Not whatever cushy room they had for him. That was not good enough. He would never pay for what he did that way. She would do it herself. She HAD to.

She picked up her keys and headed for Club Zodiac.

…

Chapter 6 section 1: A Peek through the Window
Area: Hirasaka, Hotel

"And this is what happened."

While the connection was not stable enough for an image, it was all too easy to imagine the troubled frowns on Dr. Roman and Da Vinci's faces.

"The demons that you described distorting our connection do not match anything in our database. We cannot find any kind of historical or mythological background on them."

Ritsuka blinked. "Nothing?"

"Nothing. We also lost your signal after you guys said you left the factory. You said you passed by a bizarre shop?"

"Yes" confirmed Mash "the aura felt similar to those bizarre demons we fought."

"Hmm… We could try and calibrate our instruments to detect them, but with the way they block us it'll be impossible with our connection being what it is…"

"So it's Camelot all over again" said Ritsuka.

"Kind of like that" confirmed Da Vinci.

"This could be the result of a spatial distortion" said Dr. Roman.

"A spatial distortion?"

"As Ritsuka said, this situation has similarities to when he were losing your signal in Camelot. In that case, it was the result of a time distortion due to Ozymandias's domain bringing a different era. However, there's no such indication of this phenomenon happening in Sumaru city."

Mash slowly tried to take this in. "So what you're saying is… this could be the result of a distortion in space?"

"From your description, those demons were connected to some kind of portal. Thiss could be what is throwing off our readings."

"Then what about the shop?" asked Mash.

"Perhaps it's a bounded field?" proposed Bedivere.

"A bounded field with spatial distortion as its basic principle? Sounds likely." Da Vinci grinned. *"Maybe it's a local specialty?"*

"Along with this Persona thing?"

"Maki Sonomura mentioned Carl Jung, right?"

Mash nodded. "Yes. Carl Yung was one of the greatest and most famous psychologists and psychiatrist of the 20th century."

"Right on the money! And from the way this Maki describes it, he more or less analyzed an entire school of magecraft with his "persona" research. He may have even founded it!"

"Was Carl Jung ever a magus?"

"Not that I have heard of..."

"Perhaps the local Persona users modeled their magecraft after his research?"

"That could be it too" admitted Dr. Roman. *"There are too many unknowns right now, but at least thanks to Maki we have a solid understanding of how it works. It has some superficial resemblance to the pseudo-servant system."*

"That's what I thought too" said Ritsuka.

"It's actually pretty great you secured allies!" said Da Vinci. *"Shame you could not secure the laypool at the factory though."*

"Speaking of our allies" interrupted Bedivere "I understand you have readings on Maki?"

"Yep! Nothing concrete, but here they are!"

After a few moments a file arrived at Ritsuka's device. She promptly opened it.

"So far, it seems that a Persona and its user have different skills. Maki was mostly using her Persona's skills, but she employed some personal magecraft as well during the fight."

Ritsuka noticed that too. Verdandi used a lot of spells – or skills – that she saw during her fused loop with Naoki, but Maki occasionally did some weird stuff with her gun that would not fit a Norse goddess of fate.

"Let's start with Verdandi's skills. It has almost nothing but specialized healing spells. However, it's nothing like what's recorded on the Clock Tower" said Da Vinci.

"However" interjected Dr. Roman *"there does seem to be some kind of structure system in it. All healing spells she used have the word "dia" in them, for example. Due to her specializing so much though, we have no way of knowing if it's a widespread magecraft system or just Maki Sonomura's specialty."*

Oh, it is DEFINITELY widespread, thought Ritsuka. When she was travelling with Naoki, after a few days she could tell how powerful a spell was and what type of spell it was just by its name. Not that she could mention that.

"You could still use that knowledge to our advantage" said Edmond in her head. Not that Ritsuka was planning otherwise.

"Next we have Maki Sonomura herself. Unfortunately, just like with the man in yellow we were not able to gather much information on her. Here is what we do have."

True Name: *Maki Sonomura*
Class: Caster
Alignment: Lawful Good

Parameters

Attribute: *Sky*

Traits: *Divine, Earth or Sky, Female, Hominidae, Humanoid, Weak to Enuma Elish*

Strength: *E*
Agility: B
Endurance: E

Mana: A
Luck: -

Class Skills

Divinity C
She presumably has this skill due to her ability to channel aspects of divine spirits as "personas".

Item Construction (rank unknown)
By her own admission, she crafts the mystic code bullets she uses with her firearm. She also mentioned being a painter.

Magic Resistance B
She has a general resistance towards magecraft, though it appears she has certain elemental affinities that increase or decrease that resistance. Perhaps tied to her "persona"?

Personal Skills

Extensive Knowledge of Firearms (rank unknown)
A skill she mentioned by name. Safe enough to assume it does exactly what its name implies, and enables her to use firearms with great skill.

"Wow. That's a lot more than what we have for the guy in yellow."

"It's thanks to her fighting alongside you" said Dr. Roman. Ritsuka could practically see his smile.

"Yeah, no kidding! It's a brand new branch of magecraft! I want to get as much data as possible!"

"Da Vinci…"

"Hahaha… as you can see she's very excited."

Ritsuka snorted. "I can see that." *Igor would blow her mind*.

"Back on topic… Despite your sabotage, the Triads have secured the laypool. Even though this is a Singularity, we have yet to see any servants here. That means-"

"That the Triads may have summoned a servant?"

"Singularities are powered by a Holy Grail. It should be unquestionable that there are servants present. You were incredibly lucky you did not run into one when infiltrating the factory."

"Yeah, that would have tipped them off for sure."

"I may be reaching" said Mash "but what if because of the Persona users there are no servants?"

"We can't risk that" said Bedivere. Ritsuka nodded in agreement.

"Tomorrow we're heading underground. I'd like to avoid the subway construction site first. I want to find a layline or maybe even another laypool before chasing any weird leads."

"I agree too" said Bedivere.

"Um… how would we explain them to Maki-san and Tamaki-san?"

Ritsuka blinked. "I, uh… hadn't thought of that."

Mainly because it was no issue before. Literally never. Unlike all other people in the previous loops (minus Patxi who more often than not ended up snooping on the summoning process) nobody questioned too deeply where exactly the servants came from. However, here it was a situation similar to Salem in that they had to pretend to be ordinary civilians with a pre-established party – except nothing about it was pre-planned.

"We could tell them to stay in spirit form…"

"And if they can see them? They said normal people can see Personas and demons."

This was turning out to be a headache.

"I'll leave you to brainstorm" declared Da Vinci. *"We can't strain the connection too much."*

"Alright. Thanks, Da Vinci. Dr. Roman."

"Get back to us soon!"

"Will do!"

And so, Ritsuka and her servants were left making plans for tomorrow.

…

That night…

Area: Yumezaki, Club Zodiac

Tatsuya resisted the urge to sigh at yet another complication. He suspected that this Shiori Miyashiro was at least acquainted with his brother, since she told Yoshizaka to call him and only him. The news about "other visitors" threw him off however. Never mind the police and apparently the Triads being involved in this mess, now he had a completely unknown party making a mess of things too.

Honestly, he was of half a mind to just kill Sudou right now. However, Miyashiro did not look like she had any idea what was happening; she would be no good for information.

As long as she doesn't tell my brother…

"So you took up the mantle of the Joker…" The mere thought made his vision go red. "Do you really think you can be what Jun was!? He's nothing like you!"

"Nah, my mug's t'ugly for tha. Joker was like a goddess… Heh, may I shoul' wear one too. A mask. Need a mask ta be JOKER."

Well, killing the man was out of the table for now, but burning his eye off again was not.

"I'll throw ya a bone; the Voices are sayin' weird shit. Space bein' ripped from tha outsi'e by tha dead. They look through th'eye of a false seer. Pre'y damn sure twas those brats tha' visited me. Heh, I told 'em ta check out this place an' they did! Those Chinese goons 'ere a huge pain, now nobody's here! For now. Brats must be desperate."

Tatsuya filed in this information for afterwards. If someone went spying on the Triads here earlier today, then Yoshizaka probably saw them. He would have to ask her.

A part of him felt guilty for involving her into this, but she caught up to him first.

"Ah, 'nother thin… Got an interestin' call while I was waitin' 'ere."

Another contract?

The monster in the skin of a man grinned, and it was "Hit's for Maya Amano."

Tatsuya blanked out.

Then he ignited.

…

The guy who was not Tatsuya – or rather, Other Tatsuya – came in ruffled, stinking a little and with the suicidally stupid cop lady in tow. He also had a new sword. Behind the club's bar, Nakamura freaked out even more. Anna supposed she should feel bad for the guy, because this Other Tatsuya was *freaky*.

Other Tatsuya merely glanced at him and threw the boken and the borrowed club key at him.

"I would't go in the back until it airs out. Yoshizaka, come over for a moment."

Well. She definitely had to respect how selective he was with the fucks he had to give. She got up from her seat, silently cursing her busted knee. Other Tatsuya glanced at it and then looked at her in the eye.

The Tatsuya who was a friend would not be looking at her. He would look away and then try to cover the awkwardness with a bad joke, being a bit too loud on purpose for once. This guy was silently asking if she needed a hand with that; or rather, he decided that she did not but asked if she wanted one anyway.

Anna appreciated both gestures.

She briefly glanced at the cop lady, who looked unscathed but shell-shocked. *Stupid.* What did she expect when she put a hit on herself?

The three of them headed out of the club. Other Tatsuya was not really trying to hide his newly obtained sword, but well. Nobody would give him crap about it.

First things first though… "Was JOKER really in there?"

"Yeah."

Somehow it still felt surreal. Anna felt like she was floating a bit, watching the whole mess from a distance. Everything that happened between the hit and run and now…

"Where you around here yesterday morning?"

She blinked. "Yeah, why are you asking?"

"Sudou said something weird."

Sudou? Trust this Other Tatsuya to know the name of the most wanted serial killer in the country.

"He said he sent some people to check out the Triad base here."

What.

"Oh."

He looked at her sharply. She had to turn away a little. She was not unused to intense gazes, but coming from such a familiar face… "You know something?"

"They weren't alone. I saw a weird man with long black hair in a yellow suit run out of there. Then that group came out. Two girls our age, one redhead and one with pink hair, and another dude in his twenties, foreigner. Blond with twintails."

Other Tatsuya frowned.

"You know them?"

"No, nothing I can think of matches. Did you catch what they wanted?"

"Confirm the Triad thing, apparently." They had not really talked. "They were after the yellow dude."

"Great… Another guy I don't know…"

He sounded so *tired* in a way her friend Tatsuya absolutely never did, except for those rare, *rare* times his family was brought up.

This Other Tatsuya made her skin crawl.

She could not hate him even though she wanted to.

"…"

"Hey, Yoshizaka?"

"Yeah?"

"…Thanks. …For putting up with me."

What could she say to that?

"Tatsuya's life is in your hands."

Well, probably not that. He flinched like he had been slapped.

"…I'll be careful."

Somehow, that made her feel a little better.

"I'll stick around in the club. Maybe I'll find out something new. Swing by whenever you want. And don't freak out Nakamura too much."

He cracked a smile. It was nothing like the cocky thing she was used to from her friend, but this Other Tatsuya? It suited him. "As long as he doesn't spread weird shit about me I'll take it easy."

"*Can you* take it easy?"

"Hang out with the people I used to and you have no choice. Unless there are fires involved."

Another stark reminder of how different he was. "I see your regard for the law is exactly zero."

"I was following the law until August" he replied, looking surprised that he did.

They continued with this strange banter until the cop lady called him out from her car. Anna was left nursing a smoke out on the street.

Maybe she should check up on Noriko tomorrow.

Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru - parts 18 to 23

Chapter Notes

As the title says, this chapter is entirely made up of my Persona 2 and Fate/Grand Order series.

Regular line breaks separate snips, the ... indicates in-snip breaks, as usual.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 6 section 2: A Peek through the Window
Area: ?

That night, a package was supposed to be delivered. It was small and inconspicuous. An ordinary shape, wrapped in ordinary brown wrap paper, the address and receivers clearly written down in clean and unremarkable handwriting. The package lacks any sort of stamps or a return address. It has no additional notes except that it is to be opened in private. Were it to be scanner, whether by scientific means or magecraft, it would simply show plain old paper and printer ink, just like every other piece of paper written in this entire city.

It was a package of unspeakable danger.

A man was lying on the floor. An utterly unremarkable, ordinary man, in plain old jeans and a plain old jacket, with boring features that none of his old classmates would be able to recall.

His eyes were infested with the madness carried by the authority of the king hidden in the ink.

The eyes of the man standing in opposition to him were hidden behind sunglasses. It was the middle of the night. This was of no consequence.

"It's that girl at the internet café, correct? I assume she is your main recruiter. I wonder about the size of your… group, really."

The man with the sunglasses carefully opened the wrap paper. He raised an eyebrow at the slip note containing a Wang Long fortune reading. He tossed it aside and then leafed through the contents of the book, giving it a passive read.

Anyone else would be having a seizure. This man has seen much worse.

"You definitely have access to a publisher… The binding of this book is too… commercial. Oh well. If anything your activity is beneficial to the one watching. Personally I come out a loser either way."

The man on the ground was entranced. The figure standing across was little more than a shadow yet as cutting as a blade, drowning in its presence. The figure was truly taken by Them, in every sense of the word.

"Unfortunately, he doesn't want you delivering this yet, so I'll be taking this."

"Wait-"

"Don't worry, I'll personally make sure it is delivered. They are just not quite ready yet. And I admit I'm curious, I never had a chance to read this particular book."

He turned around to leave, leaving the deliverer on the cold asphalt alone. The one on the ground scrambled to grab the note with the fortune reading. The man in sunglasses did nothing to stop him; however he paused as if something just occurred to him.

"Oh… By the way… Try laying a little low for a bit. The Paradox has arrived in this city. I assume you know what this means?"

The person who was to deliver the book froze. He remembered the messages from the gates; the shooting star who opened the gate of the million ton tombstone.

There were many, *many* things whispered about the shooting star.

Silently, the man nodded, and the figure in sunglasses left satisfied. He had a few meetings to arrange.

…

Area: ?

"Kinda surprised ya didn't notice 'em."

"Gimme a goddamn break…"

Good grief. He was already in foul mood; a job is a job but these goddamn lab walls did nothing for his mood. Not even his skills could fix this one, and he had a feeling that if he tried it, it would make the guy running this place well…

Frankly, sunglasses man did not seem like the kind to give a fuck but he did not seem like the type to cross either. And like he said, a job is a job.

That did not mean having some young hooligan giving him lip about the shit that happened at the "abandoned" factory.

"Well~?"

"Why the hell didn't YOU notice 'em? Case ya didn't notice, I'm BUSY here. My bounded field just keeps the demons out. If I were to set it up for every young upstart out there you and half the lackeys wouldn't be able to get in either."

Not to mention that bounded field was a *massive* pain in the ass to make. Regular demons were one thing; those fucking cloud things that apparently had no concept of *space* were another. At least he did not have to make one in *this* facility too – though they were probably avoiding the boss man.

Seriously though, those things were messing with his fucking brain and he wanted no part of that.

The Chinese Assassin shrugged. "Jus' figure' I'd cover ma bases."

He shrugged. Fair enough.

"Well, gotta go back ta trackin'! See ya, old timer!"

"Get the hell off my-! And he's gone."

He gave a bone tired sigh. At least *he* had fun.

He had to get back to work.

He had some forging to do.

…

Area: Aoba, Kuzunoha Detective Agency

It was well past the agency's closing time, but some lights were still on as Maki and Tamaki stood huddled over the phone.

"Does this remind you of anything, Elly?"

On the other side of the speaker, Elly's voice rang through! *"My, how exciting! A completely unseen kind of demon! Oh, I wish the train will arrive sooner, I want to check them out for myself!"*

Maki hid a sigh. On the one hand, this excitement was why Elly was always the one to ask about the paranormal; on the other, it was also why it was so hard to be around her when the paranormal was *dangerous*.

"*As a matter of fact, it DOES remind me of something!"*

The former classmates exchanged a glance."Really!?"

"*Why, yes! Your style of description fits well within…"*

Suddenly she fell silent.

"Um, Elly…?"

"*That cannot be right… But if I recall… Maki, what did you say Mr. Kandori's Persona was?"*

Maki froze.

"Elly. That's crazy."

"*Well, it's only a hypothesis… I'll see you soon! Now it's super late, and we all need our beauty sleep! Good night!"*

The line beeped.

"I-Is this normal?" asked Tamaki.

"No."

The two women were silent for a moment.

"Maki… why do you think she asked you about Kandori's Persona? He's dead, isn't he?"

Maki had a feeling that she really would not like the answer to that.

…

You are the next sun. You are the one keeping this world alive. You are its ruler and king. You are the one who condemned your people and granted them life.

You are the embodiment of all the sun's blessings and calamities.

No. That was not true. He was a false sun, a pathetic substitute that barely lit anything and only burned everything he touched.

But you are THEIR sun. Will you let those strangers take your throne from you? Over the fancy of a woman that never met you?

Shut up.

You won't save her. Her fate's already been written. Just as your scars are blooming through your skin so will hers, as long as you remain here.

As if he didn't know that…

Do you? The more you remain away, false sun, the more the brand will take hold of your flesh and your mind. Your light will be tainted and bring nothing but disease. The merchant of death will rule over the dark sky and your world will collapse.

That's why he's not planning on staying. He'll kill Sudou again and the he'll find Him *and rip his throat out with his bare hands.*

This will solve nothing and you know it. Return to where you belong and take your place in the sky, before it is taken from you. You are the only sun that will let your world live.

Tatsuya Suou woke up with a start, the first rays of sunlight caressing him through the window.

Chapter 6 section 3: A Peek through the Window
Area: Regendai, Seven Sisters High School

Ulala Serizawa woke up with a plan.

Well, sort of a plan. It consisted of "get off your shift, grab Ma-ya for your wingwoman, go to that party you've been looking forward to since last week and hopefully score a stud that won't scam you out of half your cash."

Well, the first hiccup was Ma-ya NOT getting off her shift early, but that was kind of expected because her boss was kind of a bitch.

The next hiccup was getting caught up in a police investigation, which was definitely not part of a regular high-school interview routine. Fortunately, it actually turned out to be a good thing, since it was something Ma-ya could add to her article – at least, Ulala assumed that was the case. The handsome detective did not kick them out when he went to ask questions to the teacher and they told him Ma-ya is a reporter, so it must be a no problem, right? Right.

The third hiccup was the murder.

It should not be true. She did not *want* it to be true. It was just a stupid rumour and there was no voice on the other side of the line. She was so, so, *so* drunk and so frustrated and it was really late and she was not even thinking straight and all she could think at the moment how she would have to haul Ma-ya's sleeping ass home *again* and then it avalanched and before she even realized what she was doing she dialed her own number on the phone.

And there he was. In the flesh, looking like he came out of some cheap horror flick; yet it was one of her worst nightmares. The long dark coat, the bloodied hospital gown, and a goddamn grocery store paper bag with cutouts to make it look like some deranged harlequin. Next to him was a dog that barely looked like one but the worst part? His sword was covered in blood.

They saw the principal yelling at that Anna girl with the limp leg less than half an hour ago. Next thing they know he is in his office with his guts ripped out.

He was now before them. The JOKER. The uncaught serial killer. The detective man was right besides them with his gun out but Ulala just *knew* that it would not do a thing to him.

His business with the principal was concluded.

Now it was Ma-ya's turn.

And it was all her fault.

…

Anna's hands were on her cell phone the second she heard the scream from the office. She did not even wait for an answer.

"Come to Sevens. NOW."

She knew that she would get asked about this murder too. The man who ran her over died a few days later. Principal Hannya was yelling shit at her earlier.

She did not make either phone call. Not that they would believe her. Anyone could delete a call from a phone's history, and that was all they saw.

If Anna wanted them dead, she would have done it herself. She told the cops as much.

It was risky as hell, she knew that. But she ran to the back of the school anyway; just in time for a motorcycle to come rushing in.

The Other Tatsuya tossed his helmet aside.

"It's Sudou."

She nodded.

"If anyone asks, I called you to give you a heads-up about your brother."

He was surprised. "He's here?"

"You know he's on the case."

"Weird timing… Be careful."

He grabbed the sword he stole last night and rushed in.

For now, Anna had to find Noriko.

She had a bad feeling.

…

Earlier that day…
Area: Konan

As was their habit, Ritsuka and her crew got up bright and early, got dressed, ate breakfast, and headed outside the hotel to meet up with Tamaki. Maki informed them that she was not able to get off her shift at the therapist's office this morning, so with Tamaki it was.

Ritsuka had to admit she was curious. The last demon summoner she saw was technically Naoki, and in his case he was mostly cutting deals with a bunch of demons that followed him around like a small army. Ritsuka wondered what Tamaki's style was. She mentioned there was a program, right? Who in the world would make that thing?

Da Vinci's going to have a fit… She had to secure a copy of it.

They took the bus and headed straight to the Kuzunoha Detective Agency.

Tamaki was already waiting for them at the door.

"Come in, let me introduce you!"

Curious, the squad walked inside.

Honestly, Ritsuka was expecting someone different – probably some other old classmate of Maki and Tamaki who was also a Persona user. She did not expect an almost elderly balding and very fat man with a mild expression.

"This is detective Daisuke Todoroki. He's the owner of this agency!"

"*Ritsuka, that man's possessed."*

…

Alright, that was definitely not what she was expecting.

She was also used enough to reading micro-expressions to know that this guy was *definitely* on to them.

"Detective, that's Ritsuka Fujimaru, Mash Kyrielight, and Lucius…"

Oh, they never came up with a surname for Bedivere.

"Malory."

SERIOUSLY!?

"*He has a rather bleak sense of humour…"*

"*Bedi, has that fake name ever actually worked?"*

"*Whenever necessary. Most Welsh people didn't have surnames until… around the time trains were invented."*

"*But you're using a Latin name…"* noted Mash.

"Pleasure to meet you." Oh, the detective looked *amused*.

"*Well, he's definitely on to us."*

"*Senpai, you think he knows about Servants!?"*

"*I doubt it…"*

Then again, with a Fused loop you could never know. Especially if Edmond's claim about the possession was correct.

They all shook hands and the detective invited them to sit on the couches.

"As Miss Tamaki said, my name is Daisuke Todoroki. I'm a detective but also a demon summoner on the side…"

Why am I not surprised.

"…she filled me in on your situation. Basically, the Triads are constructing mechanized military units for an unknown reason in the abandoned factory, which is also filled with unknown demons. Well, that last part is hardly surprising; to my knowledge the demon infestation was what caused the factory shutting down in the first place. There is far too much lingering energy in the place."

"*He probably means the laypool."*

Ritsuka nodded in response both to Edmond and to the detective.

"Truth be told, there are other questionable rumours regarding recent criminal activity; there are eyewitnesses claiming that black cars are taking people off the street."

"Yes, detective" said Mash. "We were able to track the Triads into the abandoned factory because we saw a rumour online about strange cars being outside."

"Baofu's website, correct? I must disclose that he has been a longtime acquaintance of mine."

"Really?" This dude knowing the admin of the rumour website was way too convenient.

"*Well, it's a magus community in a single city so it makes sense that everyone knows everyone"* said Bedivere.

"He is also very competent in close quarters combat, so when Miss Tamaki told me you were told to investigate underground by a… dubious party, I decided to call him in. Especially since you are yet unfamiliar with the city."

"Can he fight demons?" asked Ritsuka with a bit of skepticism.

"He most certainly can. He should be here in a few minutes. In the meantime, tea?"

…

Area: Hirasaka, Kasugayama High School

"Boss- you're actually skipping class!?"

"Yeah- look, it's super important and I really don't want my pops to find out."

"Yeah, but the TEACHERS will find out!"

"Tell them I'm doing clean up at the bomb shelter! They'll buy that! It ain't like they're gonna look for me."

"Alright, fine! But if we-"

"Don't worry, if they find out I'll take all the blame. I'm the Boss, after all!"

"Yeah, I know. You gotta look out for us."

"Damn right!"

…

Back at the Detective Agency

The door bell rang and everyone turned to see the newcomer.

"It has to be Baofu" said Tamaki and she got up to open the door.

"Come in!"

"Sheesh, you really called me to babysit some…"

His jaw dropped.

Ritsuka could not blame the guy because her jaw dropped too. And so did Mash and Bedivere's.

"You're the yellow suit guy!"

"You're the brats from Club Zodiac!"

"*Well"* said Edmond. *"Small world indeed."*

…

True Name: *Baofu (?)*
Aliases: Man in Yellow
Class: Assassin
Alignment: -

Attribute: *-*

Traits: *Divine, Hominidae Servant, Humanoid, Living Human, Male, Pseudo-Servant, Weak to Emuna Elish*

Strength: *-*
Agility: D
Endurance: -
Mana: D
Luck: -

Class Skills

Divinity (rank unknown)
As he is a Persona user, it's safe enough to assume that he has a rank in this skill – and the

Divine trait that accompanies it.

Presence Concealment (rank unknown)

Personal Skills

Sabotage C
Skill seen performed directly on Ritsuka during the altercation at Club Zodiac.

Chapter 6 section 4: A Peek through the Window
Area: Konan, Kuzunoha Detective Agency

"Fucking hell… You're the brats snooping around the place!? Well, not all of you- actually, what's up with your group!? A grown-ass man and two teen girls? You relatives or something?"

The man in the yellow suit – Baofu – was rightfully baffled. Well, Ritsuka did not really see the issue with their group but to each their own she supposes. However, next to her Bedivere and the others save for Mash and the detective were squirming a little, so maybe her group was actually weird. Oh well.

Now that she looked at him closer, he reminded her a lot of Waver – especially the long straight black hair and the utterly tired look as he pulled a cigar and took a long drag from it. The outfit overall was very extravagant; the yellow suit looked like it was made of satin, he wore an also probably satin black shirt with an open collar, and a gaudy set of silver necklace and earrings with overly large blue gemstones that mostly resembled sapphires. He completed the outfit with dark round sunglasses and black leather gloves and dress shoes.

How the actual fuck had they lost him back at the club!?

"*Presence Concealment"* reminded her Edmond.

Well, she could not stand there like a fool.

"Ritsuka Fujimaru. That over there is Mash Kyrielight and Lucius."

The man raised an eyebrow at the last bit – no, Ritsuka was not going to use "Malory", that was suspicious as hell – and offered her hand for a handshake. After what may have been a skeptical look – those sunglasses made reading his expressions hard – he took it. His grip was appropriately strong, but especially his fingers.

"Huh. You got some pretty odd energy in you."

"I dunno, I'm pretty crap at sensing it."

"Gotta say though, that trick you pulled back at the club was quite something. Sent chills down my spine."

"I'm best with darkness affinities." Now, that was far from a lie but her companions did not quite know the extend of it, so- *"You guys try to pass the Count's tricks as mine, okay?"* She received silent affirmations. She turned back to Baofu – this had to be an alias but she was not one to judge – "I guess you're good with debuffs?"

He snorted. "You could say that."

So he's not showing his hand…

"Baofu here is a Persona user like Maki and the others!"

Ritsuka almost laughed at the offended look on the man's face. Way to go, Tamaki.

"Okay, since we're spilling each other's beans" said Ritsuka "Mash is a defensive Tank and Lucius is front row, but he has light magic and a few neat tricks. He's pretty experienced."

"Wait, you brat are the leader of your troupe? Aren't you a tad too young for that?"

Huh?

"*Master, by regular standards of society it's very rare to refer to underage people as figures of authority, and you are also a woman… Our King hid her status for a reason…"*

The explanation only soured Ritsuka's mood. Normally she *never* had that problem – nobody ever questioned her.

But then again, she was hardly ever in the modern era.

"Yes, I'm in charge. Got a problem with that?" From behind her Tamaki tried to shush her a bit and the detective looked more amused than anything, and a bit knowing.

For a long moment Baofu stared at her. "Heh. You got guts. Okay kid, you're in charge. Looks like you're not a newbie at this."

He took a cigar out of his pocket and took a long drag.

"So, what do you got for me?"

Ritsuka relayed the information. How the Triads were using the abandoned factory to build some weird mechs, and how there seemed to be lots of soldiers and a squad wearing red berets. She also said how the man from the bizarre shop told her to search underground.

"…Gotta say kiddo, your leads sure are shady. You sure you can trust the clock guy?"

"No, but underground sounds like the perfect place for a hidden operation."

"Fair enough. And where did you hear about the rest?"

"Someone posted about the factory on your website."

"And the club?"

"Around. Everyone knows." There was no way she was telling him they got their info from a serial killer.

"Right. Well, here's what I got; the JOKER is connected to the Triads; indirectly. The JOKER's name is Tatsuya Sudou…"

The rest was information that Ritsuka already knew, so she started zoning out a little.

"Last night?"

Mash who asked the question was looking at Baofu wide-eyed, while the rest were in varied states of alarm.

"*What did I miss?"*

"*Mysterious attack last night."*

"The man who got attacked is apparently part of a cult or something; that girl at 2/ posted about it, some crap about "the agent of chaos" and the "shooting star" or whatever. I swear, either they're invisible or they're spreading panic…"

"I'm sorry" said Bedivere "but you mentioned a girl at 2/… As in, the internet café?"

"Wait, the fortune teller?" asked Ritsuka, to make sure she heard it right.

"Yup, she's one of the recruiters for that weird cult of theirs."

What was WRONG with this city.

"Anyway, most of the post was rambling nonsense, but the gist of it is that one of their members got attacked in the middle of the night by a mysterious man in black while he was on his way to deliver a package. I knew they were delivering weird packages because they tried to rope me in when my website started getting popular, but they aren't exactly common knowledge you know."

"So whoever it is who attacked them is an outsider somehow aware of their exact abilities" said Bedivere.

"Yup. You gotta wonder how. Not even I know who the members are except for the fortune teller."

"But what does this have to do with the JOKER?" asked Ritsuka. Because Sudou sure did not mention anything about cults. Then again, with that poem on the wall he did sound like a cultist… Was he a member of that cult?

"I'll get to that; when the man was asked who attacked him, he said that the man in black is an agent of the "black king" just like the JOKER and that the shooting star will punish them both."

"And how did you find this out…?"

"I have the police station tapped."

Behind them, the detective coughed.

Ritsuka shook her head. James did this exact sort of thing all the time. "And what is the shooting star?"

"No clue. But it sounds like a new player. So, want to pay the fortune chick a visit?"

…

The girl was nothing like the last time they saw her.

Aside from her bizarre words, the fortune teller at the 2/ internet café was overly friendly and cheerful. Ritsuka did not get the impression that it was a front, but it was pretty weird.

Now she looked like a thin shell of herself. Standing in her usual corner of their shop, she was clutching a piece of paper really tightly. The second she saw them she shrunk away.

"No. I won't talk. The Shooting Star is here."

Damn, they did not even get to say hello.

"The package was for you. You're special. But now that the Shooting Star is here we have to hide."

"For me?" She did not expect that. "What was in it?"

"I can't tell you. If the Shooting Star hears of us he'll come after us. We can't spread the word."

"But you could send me packages?"

"We didn't know about the others! And we didn't know he was here!"

"This shooting star dude or the guy who attacked the delivery man?"

Honestly it was a bit weird that Ritsuka went straight into the questioning phase but she was curious for answers. Especially since apparently she was the supposed recipient of the delivery.

"Both of them! The Dead Puppet – the man who attacked us – warned us about the Shooting Star."

"So you didn't know they were around until yesterday night. And who exactly are they?"

"I cannot speak of the Puppet. But the Shooting Star…? Beware. He is the Paradox, he is the False Sun that's real. He will stop at nothing to burn all away and once fire starts it won't stop."

…Ritsuka mentally noted that away.

"And how is the JOKER connected to all this?"

"…I cannot tell you. But he knows everything."

Baofu snapped. "And why the hell can't you tell us!?"

"Because THEN we'd be risking both our hides!" she snapped in return. It was the most life Ritsuka had seen out of her so far, but she shrunk right back into her shell.

"*She must be sick with worry"* thought Mash to them. *"It sounds like her companions are threatened by all sorts of people."*

A swell of fondness went through Ritsuka's chest at Mash's empathy.

"Sorry about that…" apologized Ritsuka. "We're pretty nervous ourselves. We have no idea what the threat is and well…"

"*Be careful my accomplish. Igor warned us of the threat that is hidden in knowledge. Perhaps you should pursue a different line of questioning."*

"*Yeah, good idea."* She briefly considered asking about the man at the Antique Shop, but she was pretty sure the fortune girl would not answer about him either. So their only lead left was…

"Are the Triads involved?"

The girl stared at them incredulously. "The *Triads*? As in, the group that bought Club Zodiac?"

"Don't bother" said Baofu "she probably knows nothing."

"I DO know about them!"

"*It appears that Baofu's unpleasant attitude is enough to lift the gloom off her shoulders"* noted Bedivere a little bemused. *"If in an unpleasant manner."*

"I can even talk about it openly!"

"Really!? You can help us?"

The girl cracked her first smile at Mash's exclamation. "Yeah, I can help with that. It has nothing to do with our troubles as far as I know, so there's no problem with sharing! So, you guys know about Wang Long and Laylines, right?"

"You mentioned them last time."

"Right. Well, the Triads are doing something that is SERIOUSLY upsetting the flow of the laylines around the city. I mean, at first we weren't sure it was them, but we kept hearing stuff about mysterious black cars and Triad presence in the same areas, so…" she shrugged.

"Anyway! They have claimed two large laypools; the one in the Abandoned Factory and a second one underground in Narumi. It's near the sewage processing plant."

"Narumi!? These bastards have a base in *Narumi*?"

"*Wanna bet Narumi is his turf and he didn't notice?"*

"*No bet."*

"Yeah! And like I said, whatever it is they're doing is starting to upset the Wang Long dragons. They must be drawing HUGE amounts of prana out of that, for that to happen. I mean, the Wang Long dragons travel beneath the main laylines across the whole planet, so it must be a big deal."

"And the dragons are upset… how?"

"Pretty agitated and wingling. All the fortunes are coming back a lot more negative than they should. Oh, that reminds me!"

To Ritsuka's surprise, the girl grabbed her hand and shoved the piece of paper she was holding into her palm. "This was supposed to come with the package we sent to you. A fortune read by yours truly!"

"Oh, um, thanks."

"You're welcome! Now, be careful about who you talk to, okay? I really don't want to get us all in trouble."

"Don't worry, your information is invaluable" assured her Bedivere.

"Glad to have helped!"

…

"Looks like your shady-ass lead checks out" was the first thing Baofu said as soon as they left the café.

"Indeed. And now we are aware of more dangers that await us. The lady is certain that this man in black and the one she refers to as the "Shooting Star" are certain to target us."

"At least she was able to give us some info on the shooting star guy" said Ritsuka. "From the sound of it he sounds like he has sun-related powers or something."

"Tch. Probably fire and nuclear…"

Ritsuka blinked. "Nuclear?" She did not remember THAT affinity last time she was in Amala.

"Yup. It's the Frei spells. Nasty tricks, they have some special property half the time."

The only Frei spell Ritsuka knew was Freikugel and she was fairly certain it was Almighty type. As in, unblockable. "Are they unblockable?"

"Only non-elementals are unblockable. But otherwise anything can be reflected in your face."

"Excuse me, Mister Baofu, but what is the full list of elements?"

The wire tapper decided to humour Mash. "In this town, you see fire, water, ice, earth, wind, electric, nuclear, light, dark, almighty, non-elemental, nerve, and mind. And there are also some physical spells, like sword, thrown, and stuff. And of course we have buffs, debuffs, healing, shielding spells, all sorts of things."

"I see… I never heard of some of there before. And to think it's different from city to city!"

Something in Mash's earnest enthousiasm seemed to melt something in Baofu, as he cracked a tiny smile.

Still, it looked like finding enemy weaknesses would be more of a pain here than in the Conception, with so many different options. Not that her typical baseline was much different.

Well, they will worry about it when it comes.

Ritsuka opened the parer she received from the girl.

"*The Moon Dragon of mystery will unveiled the yet hidden future from your perception. Keep an open mind and remember what you see, for this is a prologue of what is to come."*

A prologue of what's to come, huh?

"*I still think this Wang Long thing is kind of nonsense."*

Edmond did not seem to pay attention to her remark. *"Be cautious, my accomplice. I fear we are entering the den of the dragon."*

"*Don't worry Edmond, I will be."*

For now, they had to make their way to Narumi.

Chapter 7 section 1: Just Scratching the Surface
Area: Konan

Alright, step one! Find Tatsuya and tell him to stop being an idiot!

Eikichi Mishina, preferably "Michel" and un-preferably the "Panty Boss of Cuss-gay-yama High" was a man on a mission – namely make sure he stops his currently Unawake bestie forever Tatsuya from doing something incredibly stupid in this loop – *again.*

Not that he could not take care of himself – even with just his Baseline abilities Tatsuya was a living and breathing small Nuclear bomb and not many could stand up against that.

Except Kandori. Who KNEW what Kandori would do this loop. The Dreamer was unpredictable on a *good* day.

So, step one, find Tatsuya and tell him "hey I remember the world we came from, guess we lucked out in a way", so the dude would not decide to do EVERYTHING alone.

Step two… actually, it's best not to think too much about step 2 right now.

(Granted, under normal conditions it would take a while for thoughts to be a thing to be monitored. But paranoia was both a friend and an enemy here and Eikichi had exposed himself just by existing this morning,)

He knew that today was Sudou's attack on Big Sis Maya. She was still weak in this state and so were her palls; Miss Ulala and Katsuya were only just discovering their Personas now. And with that shit he heard about the Triads being busted at Club Zodiac, there was no telling what Baofu would do – his Unawake self was *seriously* obsessed with revenge.

Anyway, Eikichi knew that after Tatsuya rescues Big Sis Maya and Co. from Sudou, he would pop by the detective agency to spread that "emblem repellent" rumour. Not that Eikichi was going to stop him, it was actually a decent move – kind of trashed Kasugayama's reputation as a side effect, but Tatsuya would only worry about reputation if it risked Kasugayama becoming a demon-infested den.

Which it already was. So the point was moot.

Yeah, Eikichi really out to do some cleanup on the basement instead of lying about doing it. Those lucky brats from later in the loop *never* had to worry about a literal horsehead starting a singing competition during class hours. And the less said about The Canteen Incident the better.

But back on topic, Tatsuya. Eikichi's reasonable first step would be to get there ASAP so he can beat Tatsuya to it, then get him to team up so they could get rid of Sudou. It was on a time limit too; if Wang Long Chizuru was in town, Sudou dying would be the worst case scenario – and the dude never made it to the end of the year alive. *Ever.*

Eikichi's plans were kind of derailed though when he made it to Konan, because his phone rang.

Oh shit. Who in the-

Then he saw the caller ID. He instantly recognized it.

This can't be good.

Detour it is.

…

That evening, Kuzunoha Detective Agency

It was not long after Baofu and Miss Fujimaru with her friends left before Detective "Todoroki" received his next client for the day. Not that people randomly entering his office was really weird – most people were working in the mornings and evenings, so he never had many appointments during those hours. It was easier to set them for noons or Sundays – though this old body did tend to protest somewhat at the overtime. Besides, most midday clients tended to be of a more eccentric sort.

This new one was no exception.

It was the first thing he noticed about the boy; he too, radiated *power.* Not quite the way Miss Ritsuka and her companions did, but rather the way Baofu did. He was concealing it well, unlike the others, but he had been a ghost for quite a few years now, and a supernatural detective and demon summoner for much, much longer. He knew how to detect auras.

This boy was burning like the sun itself.

The lack of uniform was notable, the bright red leathers even more so.

And so was the mark on his right hand, or rather a *brand* – an ill, coiling and cold feeling that felt like it could stick on your skin; all his instincts were screaming at him to stay as far away from it and whatever its source was as possible.

He could tell that Miss Uchida could not feel it, but he was certain that the Nekomata in the back could.

More importantly… was this boy another piece in the puzzle? Or someone completely unrelated?

He and Miss Uchida greeted him as normal. The boy's eyes were alert and inquisitive, like he was trying to draw comparisons to some place he's been to before. At this point it was easily to tell when someone was completely unfamiliar with a space versus playing "spot the difference" in their heads.

"I heard you take any kind of job."

It was less of a question and more of a statement.

"Yes, we do."

The boy pulled something out of his pocket. "I need you to spread a rumour – the JOKER will be repelled by the Seven Sisters emblems."

Well. This one is a fascinating client.

…

Not long after the boy with the solar flare aura left, another client entered – and *this* boy was clearly skipping school, if his uniform was anything to go by.

"Did some guy in red pass by here!?"

Miss Uchida was visibly taken aback. "You know him?"

"Fuck! 'K, thanks, can you guys tell people Kasugayama is safer than it looks? Thanks, ciao!" And he threw 5000 yen on the desk.

He was out as quickly as he left.

"…Some kind of school rivalry…?" asked Miss Uchida.

"Todoroki" somehow doubted it.

…

Area: Narumi

When you could turn invisible and soundless, patrolling and spying was a like a relaxing stroll in the park.

When you could shapeshift it was even kind of fun.

Mind you, the Assassin of the Tien Tao Len Triads had no idea *why* he could shapeshift all of a sudden, and he had a bad feeling that he would not like the answer to that very much. But, he was having fun with it – right now he took the appearance of a generic middle-aged rich woman he had seen around the area. He had not been in Sumaru for long, but Narumi was that part of town where everyone who thought they were worth something or was looking for an expensive night out gathered.

Little weird, considering this was also the location of the *shit-processing factory,* but who was he to tell modern people about modern sensibilities?

He pretended to inspect the oversized green stone on his disguise's ring when something else caught his eye.

A mage, a strange girl, and *two servants.*

Heh. A' last, som' fun!

Chapter 7 section 2: Just Scratching the Surface
Area: Konan, Sewage Processing Plant

Ritsuka observed the place Baofu claimed to be the sewage processing plant, following the lead of the fortune-telling cultist. It looked largely inconspicuous, much like how she would expect a modern factory to look like. Admittedly, she did not have much experience with anything "modern" – she always dealt with either futuristic tech or past time periods, so she was far from one to judge.

That said, the location did not strike her as something a mage's workshop or anything would look like. This facility was very large, but the individual buildings were nowhere near the size of the abandoned factory in Konan. Instead the facility was a collection of smaller

interconnected buildings and a lot of tubes, all rather low in height. Then again, if it was a sewage processing plant, then most of their facilities were probably underground.

Another thing was that there were people here out in the open. She could see various cars parked in the place, a couple of folks in worker uniforms out snacking or on smoking breaks, lights open in a few windows, and overall the kind of activity expected from where people worked.

If this was the kind of place where secret operations were taking place, it sure did not look like it.

However, as usual, Ritsuka was not able to sense any magic. For all she knew this place could be pulsating power right now and it would pass unnoticed by her. On that front, her companions were far more reliable.

"Do you guys sense anything?"

Mash frowned. "I do not sense any demons in the near vicinity."

"Yeah, you don't see them out on the streets that much" replied Baofu through a drag of his cigarette. "If they're around, they should be underground. Doesn't look like there's anything going on in this part of the facilities…"

"Fou fou!"

The little fur-ball leaped out of Mash's jacket and landed on the ground, jumping up and down.

He must have sensed something…

"Fou, you can't jump put like this!"

"Oh, what a cute puppy!"

A civilian? *Fou, you may want to actually bark now.*

Ritsuka did not know if Fou had heard that, but she sure hoped he got the message.

Fou made a sound that sounded like an imitation of a bark.

"Aw, it's adorable!"

The civilian who approached them was a bit… off-putting? In that Ritsuka had next no experienced with over-dressed rich middle-aged woman like this one clearly was. Really, it was the full package, from the colourful and too heavy make-up to the permed ringlets to the stuffy and garish jacket-skirt shirt combined with the heavily patterned silk scarf. And the jewelry, ugh, what was up with the oversized stones? It was like that woman was trying to fall into every stereotype ever. Even her *voice* was grating.

Well, that voice was currently directed to Fou, who was sniffing her all around with a very suspicious look on his face. For her part, Ritsuka could only smell the heavy fragrance she was wearing along with what she assumed was the typical "old person soap" scent that she rarely encountered.

Mash politely informed the lady that Fou was a boy, prompting several "good boy oh you're so handsome" coos from her.

Can't she just leave already!?

"Hold on, my accomplice. The Beast seems to pay unusual attention to her."

That quieted down Ritsuka. Fou was sniffing her *very* intently. As if something was nagging him.

"Mash… check for enemy readings. Fou never acts like that."

"E-eh? Right! But, I'm sorry, I don't sense anything!"

Maybe she was just being paranoid?

"But my, what are you doing in this part of the city? There are far better dog-friendly parks around the area if you are looking to take him to a walk!"

"We are just exploring" replied Ritsuka.

"Oh, are you tourists? Why, you could have said something! I'm rather new to Narumi myself, but it is quite a luxurious area! I can give you a guided tour!"

Baofu opened his mouth to say something undoubtedly rude, but Bedivere cut him off. "Thank you for the offer, my lady, but I'm afraid we must decline."

"Oh, that's a shame. May I ask where you are heading then? I always find it more pleasant to walk with company!"

Ugh, really?

By now Fou was openly circling her, as if to inspect the woman from all directions.

"It seems we won't be able to disengage with her, sempai…"

"We were just heading down that way" replied Ritsuka, figuring out the same thing as much.

"What a coincidence!"

And so Ritsuka resigned herself to what would probably turn into half an hour of non-stop blabber.

...

"Oh, there is this wonderful gentleman I just *must* introduce you to! Why, he is quite the unfriendly kind of person at first glance, but his metalwork is just *wonderful*, your appearance is just too plain, my dear!"

"I, um, I will consider it…" replied Mash with an embarrassed blush.

Ritsuka was completely right in her prediction and bored out her mind because of it. Bedivere did his best to keep the lady occupied, while Mash did *her* best to stop Baofu from blowing a fuss even though he was clearly growing increasingly antsy. His fingers were clearly twitching for a fourth smoke in a row. It was a miracle he had not burned holes in his gloves with this much smoking.

But eventually she failed.

"Lady, where the hell are you bringing us, we have places to be."

"Ba-Baofu!"

She smiled sweetly. "Oh, I'm well aware."

What-

"Maste-!"

Everything went black.

…

It was cold. She was laying on something hard, her head was throbbing with her heartbeat and the buzzing of the fluorescent lights that were piecing through her eyelids. She tried to move but she was bound. Her wrists, her arms, her legs, her midsection, her shoulders, even her head were held in place. She should not have trouble breaking through and yet-

"I would not try this if I were you."

She struggled to open her eyes, her eyesight blurry. Before her was a dark figure. By the voice a man. All dressed in black.

"I'm aware you think you can overpower any plain bond, so I made certain that you could not. I am rather experienced in dealing with people with surprising power, I assure you."

Ritsuka tried to summon magic but-

"I would not try this either. Or talking."

Her throat was closed. But that did not mean-

"Count-"

"He's not here."

…!?

"I must admit your passenger was unexpected, but much like your other companions, separating you was hardly an issue. My research has always been centered on the mind and the psyche, the components of the soul. And you are quite a fascinating subject."

Her vision grew clearer. It was indeed a tall man, in an expensive all-black suit, with eye-concealing sunglasses, clutching a pair of Baoding balls, while holding another hand behind his back. What little was visible of his skin was covered in thin black scars, almost stylized.

"Let's see… Fujimaru Ritsuka, a kitsune, and a total stranger to this city… and this time."

The lady from before. It was a trap. They walked right into enemy territory and Fou was so suspicious of her, and this man *knew her name* even though there was nothing on her person that stated it.

"You have already attracted the attention of some peculiar people. You were supposed to receive a package this morning, correct?"

Wait, was he-

The man revealed what he was hiding behind his back. A thin book with a black cover, featuring a bizarre winged figure in yellow. The title on the cover was written in clear English. "The King In Yellow."

"Make no mistake, this book is a recruitment tool. Granted there is an anthology by the same title written by Robert Chambers, if I recall his name correctly, but it is merely a collection of incidents involved regarding a play of the same name. This would be that play."

What was he going on about?

"Here's how the recruitment goes – granted, you may take this with a grain of salt since it's mere speculation on my part. Should you retain your ability to reason upon reading it, the Cult will recruit you as a member. I admit, it's quite the interesting read, though occasionally I marvel at the lack of observation skills and preservation instincts that several characters posses. Especially Camilla. But it *is* meant to be performed rather than read…"

Ritsuka struggled against her bonds. She had no idea what this dude was going on about, but she was going to get some *actual* answers from him.

It was obvious he was the man who assaulted whoever was to deliver her this book, and left the fortune teller and the cult scared shitless. The Dead Puppet.

She needed fucking answers.

"I have already told you these bonds were designed specifically for you… But oh well. A good businessman knows to make contingency plans. And I was looking forward to testing the effects of this play."

Contingency plans?

"A gate to the soul. A gate to the mind. A gate to the underworld. A gate to the divine. May the essence be reborn, for I hold the key. Initiating…

"DEVA System."

Chapter 8 section 1: Deep Dive
Area: ?

The light dances on the soft waves, a kaleidoscope of all the shades of blue, green, and golden created by the soft breeze with its soft and salty scents – poetry in motion as it were; all the million colours of the stones and the sand laying at the bottom, curved smooth and thin by the unrivalled hand that was the passage of time, and the careful hand that was the sea, the mother of all but those stones, for those were born deep, deep into the bowels of the earth until another mother emptied them out of her chest with her screams, raw and blazing until the touch of the sea brought out the gorgeous shades hiding within.

They are beautiful, these stones. These waves. You could spend an eternity in the embrace of the mother picking them one by one, a new detail revealed with each look. There were as many stones as the stars reflected on the surface of the water. An ocean above and below, the reflection of the light no less real than the light itself, the echo of the nebulas beyond right there between your fingertips as you play and laugh and the breeze carries your voice far away to a man standing at the distance, clad in robes as bright as the sun itself.

You dance among the waves as he watches, and then she takes your hand and dances with you, calling on the human-faced squid to take you for a ride faster than the birds in the sky, faster than the molten glass raining down the earth along with the thousand young, fast-fast-fast until you reach the end and have upturned every single stone at the bottom of the world so they can reveal all their colours.

Stones as many as the stars. The shape of the stars. The shape of the stones. That which gave birth to the stars gave birth to the world – the *stars* gave birth to the world. The shape of the stones is the shape of the stars. All is born from the dust of the stars. The stars sparkle like the droplets of salt water in the air as you play in the waves. You toss them over the surface and watch them skip over the mirror of the fabric of the cosmos.

The fires of the rocks are extinguished as the fall into the water and rise towards the sky and she pouts before shrugging it off. It does not matter, for in the end of the world all shall return to its original state. The stones shall return to the womb of their mother, the dust will fuse back into becoming a star again. You dance unbothered in the rain of fire for it adds more colours to the light dancing in the waves, oranges and reds, and new blues different than before, and the breeze now is a million, all tiny little breezes, a cold one that tingles, a hot one that's sharp, a warm one like an embrace, a cool one like freshwater, and an *other* one engulfing them all, so strong it may be the air itself. Your hair and hers dance in the breeze, and the yellow robes of the man sway.

The human-faced squids are dancing around the man, they dance with the young that rained down from above along with the stones in the embrace of a new mother, and you along with *her* join them in the dance.

This world is beautiful.

You laugh and dance and splash your tails on the water over the many, many young and stars and stones and flames between her feet. The heavens are limitless and the oceans are endless with only the shape given by the roar of the earth in sight. She asks you if you are happy.

Yes. You are. You are happy. You could do this forever. This world is infinite.

She is happy to hear you say that.

In the coast of a beach from a distant memory, a black flame screams.

A second passes. An eternity passes. The man in yellow is watching and she invites you to the skies. You spread your wings and she spreads hers and you follow her. The moon is also a mirror of the stars, the reflection as real as the real thing, the moon is a reflection and a fragment of the earth, born from the earth and watching the waters that reflect it. It is her home and she is happy here, she is its ruler and she can do what she wants. You watch the stars away from the flames, you watch the eyes that watch you from afar, a star yourself among so many. The mirror in the sky is ever-changing and time stands still.

The young are around you, and the man in yellow is watching from behind you.

You do not have to wish for this moment to last forever and ever. It already does.

She takes your hand with a coy smile as bright as the slit on the land formed by the earth's hottest bowels. As bright as the moon at a waxing crescent. Yes, she is happy. She is your friend. She is happy at your happiness.

Somewhere in the world below, a black flame rages.

Somewhere in the world above, someone's eyes snap open.

Somewhere in the world beyond, someone's eyes fall closed.

You jump a distance further than you have ever jumped before, and you dive deep into the reflection of the stars. You emerge and the water becomes still again, a true reflection.

The man in yellow stands in the still, still waters, and so do you. The arrow of the moon, the moonglade, has stilled the waters of the stars into a perfect mirror. You stand on the mirror and whether you are trying to avoid or step on all the stars is a mystery to yourself.

He is a salesman, he explains, and his voice cuts and fades. He holds three items to you, and asks you to choose one.

A book, a fruit, and a key.

Something nags at you.

Time stands still, just a second away from the next day.

She is urging you to leave.

You rub at your horns and your wings twitch in displeasure. Why hurry? She told you that you have all the time in the world.

He has no reason to be here, she says, he is an intruder and a stranger who is trying to take you away from her.

Somewhere in a distant shore, a black flame yearns for release.

Somewhere in a distant shore, an eye searches for a peep hole.

Somewhere in a distant shore, a hand reaches out to a dream.

You are curious because you are sure he is her friend. But she wants you to stay with her and the young, forever and ever and ever, because that will make you happy.

For as your luck would have it…

…there is nothing your beautiful kouhai enjoys more than making all your selfish dreams come true.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this ended on a weird note. I haven't really said this before, but if you have ANY questions about the projects, regardless if it's about the parts I wrote or not, do not hesitate to ask.

In other words, I really want to talk about part 23.

I hope you enjoyed! See you soon again.

Miscellaneous 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – parts 24 to 26
Author: me (HelenTheMoon aka Lermis)

Chapter 7.5 section 1: Just Scratching the Surface – Another Side
Area: Konan, Aerospace Museum

"Ta-chan… I'm serious. This ain't a trick, man."

Tatsuya gripped his sword even tighter – a grip that he *knew* was a bad move, but nonetheless his knuckles went white with the strain. It made the Brand in his hand stand out even more.

Eikichi *loathed* that thing; not what it symbolized, not really, but for what it could *do* to Tatsuya.

What it *was* doing to Tatsuya.

"It's not like you to lose your head like this. Try to chill out a bit, huh?"

"…always mocking me… Like I don't *know*..."

"Ta-chan. This ain't a fucking trick. You know better than that. You're the only who noticed that Maya-nee was a fake last time! Come on, dude."

"Will you stop fucking lying if I rip your tongue out?"

Eikichi's skill alerted him of a change in Tatsuya, and-

-*shit.*

"I'll guess I'll have to shoot some lead along with sense into ya, huh!? Bring it on, Ta-chan!"

…

Earlier that day…

Eikichi did not know what to think when he received a phone call from Igor, except that this would be very bad.

Igor had a policy. He never interfered with his guests. All the Velvet Room attendants – save this Elizabeth he met a couple of times – followed the exact same policy. The sole exception to this were those times Nameless called everyone in their sleep to help stop the guys from Karukozaka High from accidentally firing a satellite laser canon on Japan. Honestly, Eikichi

was always looking forward to that particular variant, having Wayland and a band of actual demons backing his vocals was pure awesome.

All that aside though, Igor directly calling someone was always bad news. As he was running towards the Velvet Room entrance in the Konan shopping district, Eikichi was trying to run all the possible scenarios through his head.

This was obviously either a fused loop or a variant – things on the Other Side had gone the same as ever, but their abilities were different. Everyone had these "classes" and "skills" and "attributes" and so many other stuff on top of everything else that Eikichi had *no* idea where they came from, and made fighting even more complicated than it usually was. However, his loop memories showed him no other changes than that. They still ran around chasing rumours, they still cried a lot, they still made their bootleg Conception with Philemon, and Tatsuya still could not bear to keep his end of the deal so now they were hunting Sudou again.

Now that he thought about it, his Class was different now that he was Awake… came with an interesting bonus… and took away another skill he had. *Win some, lose some…*

All thoughts came to a grinding halt when he reached the blue door and ran in. The Velvet Room looked the same as it ever did in their section of the loop, the blue lounge with the velvet curtains, and the raised platform where Nameless and Belladonna were performing their duet.

The Demon Painter was lashing out at his canvas. Eikichi sneaked a glance at what he was drawing. It was an ocean with a stary sky above, and two girls playing in the waves. But he was now grabbing the red paint and splattering stuff all over it.

Igor was hunched in his couch as always.

"Welcome to the Velvet Room, Eikichi Mishina. I was expecting you."

"What's going on, Igor? You NEVER call us."

Igor told him.

Eikichi cursed.

"Well, that fucking backfired."

"Indeed."

…

Baofu was *not* with Maya-nee and the others. While he was no Anchor and generally uninvolved in the events of This Side when Unawake, he honestly could not recall a single instance when an Unawake Baofu was not with the group.

That meant in all likelyhood that Maya-nee would not go after Sudou in the Sanitarium. He had absolutely no idea what she would do now.

Still, the priority was Tatsuya. If things went according to baseline, he should be spying on Jun right now just in case Sudou decided to go after him. Based on that they *should* be in the Aerospace Museum, but Sudou normally lured Maya-nee there before setting the place on fire. What would he do now?

Except that according to Igor, Tatsuya did NOT do the exact same things as he did in Baseline in this loop. Probably because this was a *fused* one and this Ritsuka decided to bust the Triad operations as soon as she heard of them, apparently.

Getting used to fused loops was going to be a pain.

Eikichi shook his head. He had to find Tatsuya, tell him that he remembered, and hope that things did not go horribly wrong. Dealing with an Unawake Tatsuya was… a challenge. Not in terms of combat, Eikichi was a looper after all, but honestly combat was the *least* of their issues.

No, non-looping Tatsuya was a bundle of "I work alone" issues, and saddled with an asshole that made it a thousand times worse.

Hold on, I'm coming…

…

Area: Regendai, Seven Sisters High School

Anna watched as the group of adults made out of the school dazed. Tatsuya's brother, the reporter chick and her friend. They probably would up talking about the JOKER – Sudou. Tatsuya's brother in particular appeared to be fuming. The two women were looking at him concerned, but they did not say anything.

The increasingly paranoid part of her brain remembered that parole officer lady from the club and her request to only talk to Tatsuya's brother if something went south.

Anna put two and two together; something just happened between Tatsuya's brother and the police.

She recognized the look on his face from the Tatsuya she knew – he was about to do something incredibly reckless.

Better listen in on that. That guy probably doesn't want his cop brother getting involved with this nonsense…

"ANNA-NEESAN!"

Anna and the adult trio turned to the source of the noise. Noriko and Miss Saeko.

Anna was relieved that she was okay. She really was. But…

Noriko ran as close to her as she could and all but grabbed her from the collar of her uniform. "I told them! I told them you didn't do anything, I swear! They won't blame you for this I'm

sure of it!"

Behind them Miss Saeko, Tatsuya's brother and the reporter were trying to calm the girl down.

The girl who told her she only joined the track team because of her. Who went to her every single event to cheer her on. Who could barely look at her in the eye as she stuttered when talking to her. Who always looked so excited to practice in the track with her. Who followed her everywhere even after the accident and guarded Anna's running shoes in her gym locker. Who, whereas Anna was resigned, she was in denial of Anna's dream being destroyed.

And with a startling certainty, Anna knew that Noriko had done something horrible for her.

•••

Ulala looked at this Anna girl and her perfectly blank face as she stared at her *kouhai* with the feeling that something terrible just happened.

Perhaps Ulala was projecting. Perhaps she was hoping that this tiny girl was not as stupid as she was.

She rechecked the boxing tape around her hands. She had not come to Maya's work and school with her hands wrapped up, as she had just finished from work. She had to do her wrap quickly once they ran into JOKER's army of demons in the school. Miraculously, the tape had not been ripped off, but there was strange goo stuck on it from those Slimes.

Punching glorified jelly was *weird.*

She knew she was distracting herself. That was fine. She needed a distraction.

"Where are you guys going?"

Huh? Had she missed a conversation?

"Oh, we're just are going to check something we heard!" said Ma-ya.

Right. The rumour thing. This Philemon guy better not be pulling their leg with that one. Though he did not look solid enough to get punched in case he did. Shame.

"And you're taking Suou-san with you?"

"Oh, you know each other?"

"She's friends with my little brother, Miss Amano."

"Hehe, that sounds cool!"

The awkwardness that followed that statement hit her like a wave. Ma-ya remained unfazed. Ulala was jealous of that.

She was jealous of *many* things about Maya.

Yeah, and look where the fuck THAT got us.

She shook her head. "Will you girls be okay here?" she asked the two high-schoolers.

"Are you going to Club Zodiac, Anna-neesan?"

This Anna seemed to think on it for a moment, but Suou protested. "I advise against it! Surely you heard of what happened two days ago!?"

Ulala knew what the detective was referring to. Apparently some weirdoes picked a fight with a bunch of Triad thugs right at the club's entrance. Not that it seemed to affect business all that much – most of the clientele were high school kids who did not give a damn if there were people in expensive suits smoking even more expensive cigarettes in the back.

Anna turned to the detective sharply. "Does the police know anything about that?"

Suou's face darkened again. "There has not been an investigation yet."

Hoo boy, he looks ready to go cowboy cop on us…

Apparently Anna reached a decision. "I was there during that."

"WHAT!?"

They all yelled at her.

"What do you mean!?"

"I skipped school and was hanging outside the club. I saw a bunch of weirdoes running out. Some dude in a yellow suit with long black hair, a blond foreign man with pigtails, and two girls around, one with red hair and another with pink. Both had short haircuts."

"What?" protested Ulala. "How many people are we chasing now!?"

"U-um, thank you, but why are you telling us all this?" asked Suou.

"You're a detective, you're supposed to investigate stuff."

"And you never informed the police?"

Anna shrugged as if that answered everything.

"Uh, guys?" asked Ulala. "What does that have to do with the JOKER?"

"Not much. But it is odd that it has not been investigated yet…"

"We should check it on our way to Konan!" declared Ma-ya! "The club should open soon! Two birds in one stone!"

"Should we not prioritize visiting the detective…?"

Ulala was inclined to agree. Ma-ya's story about the teen in red leathers who rescued them while they were knocked out still sounded unreal, but he sounded like he knew what was going on which was more than what could be said for the rest of them.

Anna was still stone-faced. Noriko was looking at her oddly.

"Let's get out of here, Noriko. Doubt there'll be classes."

"R-Right!"

The two girls were off to directions unknown.

Maya turned to them with a brilliant smile. "First stop, Aoba! Let's tell Mizuno-san that the high school interview was a total scoop!"

That's not what you call a murder!

"Second stop, we go to Club Zodiac to catch the Triad guys!"

Are you sure they did not just LEAVE?

"Third stop, we go to the detective's office to see if the rumour curse is true!"

"I'm still very doubtful of that…" said Suou.

"You just summoned a cat god in a tuxedo from your soul…" said Ulala, conveniently ignoring that her own Persona had Shibari bondage over her dress.

"And last! We are getting some drinks!"

That last bit sent Ulala down in the dumps again. "Oh man… I was really looking forward to that matchmaker party."

Suou spluttered at the "matchmaker party", but Ulala could not bring herself to care. She was definitely going to need those drinks.

…

Chapter 7.5 section 2: Just Scratching the Surface – Another Side
Area: Aoba, Kismet Publishing

Aoba was what many called the cultural center of Sumaru City. Just about every news agency and publishing company had its headquarters here, right next to the large city park and the Aoba Park Outdoors theatre that was host to concerts all year round. While it was not really the place the youth of Sumaru usually gathered – that would be Yumezaki – it was still one of the busiest parts of the city during working hours.

Maya's workplace was no exception. Kismet Publishing had its headquarters and offices in Aoba just like every other company, and this included the teen magazine *Coolest* for which she wrote.

Maya asked the others to wait in the lobby while she went on to calm down the panicking receptionist who heard of the attack at Sevens from the gravepine or something. Katsuya looked visibly uncomfortable with that, apparently distraught that news of the JOKER attack could have spread within the time it took them to get here.

Coolest was a teen magazine. Fashion tips, sports news, new idols and the latest gossip was its bread and butter. Maya was typically the one to do the interviews because she was the genuine kind of cheerful – the type of person that teenagers would warm up to really quickly.

Unfortunately, while Maya was one of the five people in there who took their job seriously, the magazine sales were dropping. Also unfortunately, one of those five people who took their job seriously was their manager Mizuno.

Mizuno was an *absolute bitch.* And quite frankly should be writing about politics like that dude who wanted to quit. And it was her idea to have Maya ask the high-schoolers about the JOKER since their "weekly Wang Long reading" was not quite enough to keep sales up even though the girl in charge of that – another person in the "five people who are actually invested" group – was seriously considering making a hotline for it because it was THAT popular.

Fifteen exhausting minutes later, Maya had informed Mizuno that she had encountered the JOKER face to face (or face to mask), yes, she did see the corpse of the principal, no she did not take pictures of it or the JOKER due to the threat to her life (and because there was a demon hound baring its teeth at her but she left that detail out), and there is a detective on the case downstairs would you like to talk to him?

At least Mizuno was not enough of a bitch to ignore that Maya just had a close-up with the most notorious serial killer of the decade and only asked for the recordings of the interviews as well as a brief outline of what the JOKER looked like – though she yelled the whole thing and ordered Maya to get her ass back to work the next. Maya had no issue with that part, even as Yukino was growling that she should just forget about the stupid article altogether.

Actually, now that she was standing close to Yukino, the photographer was throwing her some odd glances…

"Something wrong, Yu-ki?"

She blinked. "Ah, it's nothing, don't sweat it. Are you okay though? Shame you missed that party…"

"Yeah, Ulala was really looking forward to it… You got any plans?"

Yukino grinned. "A couple of old classmates of mine are going to arrive here in Sumaru tomorrow morning."

"Oh, like a high school reunion?"

"Yeah, bit of an unofficial one. We just didn't really get to hang out for a while, some of them are out of the country."

"That's so cool!"

"Yeah, guess so. We got some really successful guys from our old class. Shame Mark and Yuka won't make it though."

Soon Maya was done uploading all the recording to the computer and handing them to the other writer, who wished her to have some good rest, but to her surprise Yukino interrupted her again.

"Say, Maya…"

"Yes, Yu-ki?"

"You said you have a detective on the case downstairs… I overheard you through the door…"

"Oh, uh… was I that loud…?" How was she going to tell Yukino the detective had been kicked off the case…?

"You aren't going straight home, are you."

Maya startled. Yukino looked at her straight in the eye, dead serious. "I'm coming with you."

What!? But the JOKER was dangerous! Extremely so! He could summon demons! And how would she explain the whole Triads and rumours thing to her? She could not involve Yukino into this!

"Are you sure, Yu-ki? I'm just going to hang out with Ulala and-"

She huffed a laugh. "You're a terrible liar."

That shut Maya up.

"I can take care of myself. I'm more experienced with weird shit than I look."

Maya… had no idea what to think. She could not really talk Yukino out of this, but… maybe she could try to dissuade her? Or see if she could really come? Or something? "How do you feel about attacking a Triad base?"

Yukino blinked, clearly not expecting that. For a second Maya thought that she would back off or call her crazy, but it was dashed a second later when a wild smile appeared on her lips. "Good. Now I'll have something extra to brag about in the reunion. Lead the way."

Well she took it well.

Maya just hoped she would take the weird floating tarot spirits just as well.

…

Area: Konan, Aerospace Museum

Eikichi was immensely grateful for Resonance. The ability to detect other Persona users was incredibly useful, and he was still baffled that the ones from later in the loop did not seem to have it. It was the best tracking tool; if you sense a Persona user you don't know, assume they are an enemy.

In this case, Eikichi was using his expertise with it and his newfound Class Skill (which was not meant to be used that way, but there was merit to mixing and matching) to find Tatsuya's solar flare aura, and was not disappointed. As expected, he was in Konan, and that was where Eikichi followed him. If Tatsuya were Awake, he would have sent him a text and they would have jumped on Sudou as fast as possible, but that was not really an option now.

The Aerospace Museum was the same as ever. If Eikichi was lucky enough to Awake early he would visit the museum because it always went up in flames really fast.

After some consideration, he decided to sneak in the museum as opposed to walking through the front gate. He did not want to clue in anyone that he was here, in case Sudou decided to flip the script. Eikichi had too much practice hiding his resonance from others to be detected.

A muted resonance drew his attention. Jun was here. Even inactive, Personas also had some resonance. Soon the kids from the school trip would arrive.

Eikichi tried not to think about the times they failed to save them.

And now, it would be just him and Tatsuya here… should he do something to prevent the kids from entering the building…? But would alert Sudou… AAAH, he HATED dealing with that bastard.

Eikichi focused on Tatsuya again and-

-*something snapped.*

Shit.

…

Tatsuya's brand was throbbing and he wanted to rip his skin out. His head was pounding. It made him focus right ahead. Jun, *beloved Jun*, was standing with his back turned away from the wall as the demons he once commanded whispered around him, cradled him, the woman with her hair thrown before her face, the shades of the goddess were whispering sweet nothings of death to Jun, while the horses with the harps were singing her praise. He was contemplating a flower but the headache made it hard for Tatsuya to tell what it was – a chrysanthemum? Why would Jun carry a chrysanthemum? He was supposed to have an iris didn't he? Why did he have a chrysanthemum. What was that flower. Why was that flower. Chrysanthemum meant death. What was that flower.

That flower.

That flower.

That flower.

There was a red spider lily dropped to the ground and Tatsuya's head was pounding because something just ~~brøke~~.

…

Somewhere in a distant shore, a girl fell into the ocean.

…

Blue hair. Blue uniform. Eyes red like blood. A guitar case.

No. Not a guitar case. There was a modified mechanism up top. He did not recognize it. But he knew the philosophy of the design. It was a machine gun disguised as a case.

His field of vision was blackened from the sides and his arm was throbbing. His head was throbbing. All he could think of was *that flower that meant death.*

Death.

Eikichi.

"Ta-chan… I know this is super weird, but I remember. I followed your resonance."

No.

No.

No.

NoNoNoNoNononoNonOnONoNonOnoNonOnoNnOnoNOnoNOnONoNOnoNOnoNOnoONnoNOnoNOnoONoONNoNONo

"I'm telling the truth, it's me!"

It was ***Him***. It had to be ***Him.***

It was a lie another disguise to fucking MESS with him again.

"Eikichi" said something to Jun. Jun was looking at him. Tatsuya. His visible eye was wide. The irischrysanthemumredspiderlily dropped and "Eikichi" picked it up. **He** picked it up. Jun ran. He ran. Why did he run? Was he scared? Of who?

Of course. Jun was scared of ***Him.***

Tatsuya drew his sword, the stolen steel.

"Ta-chan… I'm serious. This ain't a trick, man."

Hekept *talking. Pretending. Acting.* So so *so* convincing not like that time with Maya-nee, not like that at all, that Shadow was so obviously fake and cold and Eikichi**He** reeks of *Death.*

"It's not like you to lose your head like this. Try to chill out a bit, huh?"

"…always mocking me… Like I don't *know*..." *those fucking TRICKS he always pulls.*

"Ta-chan. This ain't a fucking trick. You know better than that. You're the only who noticed that Maya-nee was a fake last time! Come on, dude."

A sense of calm descended on Tatsuya. Focus. Heat so great that the body felt cold. The sun itself, ever steady and eternal from afar.

Maya. Of course he brought up Maya. ***He***was in his head after all. Always had been. He knew every single little thought he ever had. He *loved* playing with his thoughts did he not. He was putting *words* in them.

His gaze lingered on ***His*** mouth and the black lipstick, done as perfectly as only a hand that had done it a million times could manage. He saw the mouth moving.

"Will you stop fucking lying if I rip your tongue out?"

The brand was BURNING.

"I'll guess I'll have to shoot some lead along with sense into ya, huh!? Bring it on, Ta-chan!"

…

Chapter 7.5 section 3: Just Scratching the Surface
Area: Konan, Aerospace Museum

That skill-

Apollo burst into existence in a torrent of flame and Eikichi dodged, cursing at the heat. Normally he could tank that; but *not* when Tatsuya was like this, not with that *Skill* active; he opened the barrel of his machine gun and fired at him; Tatsuya dodged but-

"**Bloody Honeymoon!**"

Like this, he's weak to it.

Tatsuya is always weak to Water, but while Awake, he can resist it; not now, under His influence though; it did not matter that Holy and his Mind ailments would not work-

He burned it!?

Eikichi moved to dodge-

-pain.

He screamed. He saw the flash of a blade.

"Malaquadyne!" A barrier of water, blocking Tatsuya's path. Eikichi fired through it, ignoring the pain of Tatsuya's sudden attack as much as he could.

The fiery one took another step and-

"Dark Verdict!"

Now Tatsuya screamed, as Eikichi hit his weakness again.

I can't give him any breathing room. If I do-

"Bless-"

"HELL NO!"

He fired his machine gun again but Tatsuya jumped, sword aimed right at his head, forcing Eikichi to block with his guitar case, the blade digging deep in the plastic.

Tatsuya's eyes were glowing yellow. His face was twisted in a snarl. His next words were a growl.

"*Blessing from the Beloved.*"

And Eikichi screamed again.

...

"Sup."

Jun froze mid-run. The man had not been there before.

He was tall, incredibly so, looking like he came straight out of a horror movie. A bloodstained hospital gown and a black trench coat thrown over his shoulders, his face hidden under a grocery paper bag with a twisted drawing of a harlequin on it. In his hands was a katana, held almost carelessly.

"Gotta say, that Eikichi ruined things better than I ever could."

Eikichi- *Michel?*

Jun knew why he was running. Because the boy in red seemed to lose it. Because Eikichi knew that boy from somewhere and whatever he said filled his eyes with fury, as he was staring at Jun. The way that boy was staring at Jun… at the flower in his pocket… at *him*...

It was so familiar…

Michel – the Boss – told him to run. So he did. He was pretty sure the counter lady called the police already.

But this man…

"What do you mean? Who are you?"

He chuckled and the sound sent a sick coil right to Jun stomach.

"I go by-"

-and time broke.

The wind was knocked straight out of his chest, a thick coil around his heart, his head was *screaming*- it was as if the world itself had *stopped-*

-and as suddenly as it came it passed.

Jun fell on his knees.

What… was that?

The man burst into laughter. "Man, they're really going at it in there! I wish I could see it. You're pretty damn lucky, Exalted One."

The headache was *splitting.*

"Who… are you?"

"Ah, right. Didn't introduce myself. These days I go by JOKER."

"What?"

"Yeah. Wasn't 'riginally my name, ya know. That used to belong to you."

What. "Is this some kind of-"

-and they froze.

JOKER froze. The world froze. The wind stopped blowing. The silence was deafening. All colours reversed. *Something* was pulling at Jun and he could not help but look from where the pull came from, straight from the museum he just ran from.

In the deafening silence of the void, he heard it.

"NOVA KAISER!"

The glass *shattered,* still in the wind like a picture taken at just the right moment.

What is HAPPENING

He-

-he ran.

He covered his ears and eyes with his hands and ran blind as the frozen glass *exploded* from the pressure within the building, as sound itself returned with a roar, and so did a scream that only urged him to run faster. The man was screaming too but Jun did not listen.

He had to run.

…

Eikichi was not weak to Nuclear. More importantly, he was a Looper. His magical resistances were off the charts.

That did not matter when fighting Tatsuya. Not when *He* was influencing him, not with the brand on his arm and his soul, drawing power right from their very *existence*.

I had no intention of using this… but he managed to grit it out all the same.

"Judge of the Eastern Gate."

Tatsuya had less than a second to react as the *weight* of the Skill fell on him, forcing him to his knees. He opened his mouth – to cast something, Agidyne, his Blessing, another Nova Fucking Kaiser, it did not matter.

Eikichi was faster. Normally he did not need to d this. It had been a long time since back when he had. It was *himself* casting his spells after all. But for that extra push, when things *had* to be decided; he summoned his Persona.

"**BLOODY HONEYMOON!**"

He flooded the room with the waters of Styx, quelling the flames of the sun.

Hitting right at Tatsuya's weaknesses.

Everything froze, but not in the way Tatsuya or Big Sis Maya did it. The cold that Hades brought with him was the cold of death. The chill touch that sent shivers of wrongness down one's spine. Eikichi knew the cold touch of death, the waters of drowning, since he was but a young child, full of self doubt and later faked confidence. The bouquet of black roses and silver skulls was just at the edge of his vision, casting out the light of the sun.

Tatsuya fell right into the waters of Styx.

Eikichi caught him before he could land.

Behind him Hades faded in fragments of blue light. The cold of his presence lingered.

That *Skill* that Tatsuya had on deactivated. Eikichi let out a sigh of relief. He had a good hunch on what would happen if it was still on, and he did not like it.

Sorry, Ta-chan…

Fuck… why could he never STOP THIS!?

"Damn, you two did a number to this place."

Eikichi recognized the voice instantly. "Sudou!"

Tatsuya Sudou – King Leo, the JOKER – strolled inside in all his bloody glory, his face uncovered. No point of hiding it in front of those who knew him. "Yup, that's me. Was kind of hoping you'd kill each other, but nah. The Voices say it's better to keep ya all alive."

"You as hell didn't stay alive last time you fought us" said Eikichi, relishing the way the killer's face twisted in a snarl. "Hell, bet you can't even take Tatsuya on his own." It was all completely true of course. One of the universal constants of this branch in particular was that Tatsuya Sudou would be killed by their hands. No way around it.

"Keep running your mouth. I haven't even done anything to ya on This Side. I didn't even kill the witch."

The "witch" being Maya. Eikichi knew why; it was because *He* needed all five of them alive for now. "Not killing someone ain't a fucking favour." Not that saying this to Sudou would help any. If there was any point when Sudou could have been helped, it had passed *ages* ago.

"Whatever. I'm just sayin', before you put a bullet in my head, it's not me you should be worried about."

"Oh yeah? And who is?"

"The Exalted One. Wanna bet he went straight to the police?"

Shit.

"Too bad you weren't in the run for long on the Other Side, the Voices made it sound-"

BAM

Eikichi knew that bullet did not land. He was not even really aiming, and that fucker could teleport. Besides, if he *really* wanted Eikichi to be caught, he would have engaged him here and now.

Or maybe not. The "Voices" probably told him how much stronger he was. Or not. It honestly depended on who *He* wanted to fuck over that particular day. Tatsuya was a permanent resident on that list.

Still… as Eikichi hoisted the unconscious Tatsuya over his shoulders, and shoved his machine gun back in his Pocket, he could not help but think…

I don't like this…

At least the museum didn't get ruined by FIRE this time.

…

Jun practically ran through the automatic doors of the police station, nearly slamming into an officer standing in the corner, out of breath and shaking.

"Fight! At the Aerospace Museum! And I saw the JOKER!"

The station erupted into chaos. The remnants of adrenaline drained out of Jun, and he fell on his knees. The officer he nearly ran into caught him.

He did not see this, but a bald ornery man in there scowled.

When the police arrived on the site a few minutes later, a woman spoke of the voices of two young men arguing. But she saw nobody.

Half the ground floor was flooded. The walls were scorched. Bullet marks everywhere, unidentifiable. The results that would come a few days later were blank. No sign of the ones she heard arguing.

And no sign of the JOKER.

[Persona 5], [Iron Chef], [Food Wars]
Now Entering Kitchen Stadium
Author: VS21

"If memory serves me right, Curry was first introduced to Japan in the Meiji Period, being originally considered a 'Western' food due to it not being native to Japan, but now in the present day Curry has since become an integral Japanese dish" Chairman Kaga mused to himself (or rather to the camera and microphone recording his words for those attending today's battle in Kitchen Stadium) as he took his time before saying, "Curry is a dish that I've taken quite a liking to recently, in an attempt to rediscover my roots, and I have recently discovered a Chef whose curry I found simply astounding and that I must see how well he does in the fires of my Kitchen Stadium..."

Taking a moment to let the background music swell he spoke up and said, "Today's challenger, a young Looping chef of renown, Chef at Cafe LeBlanc in Yongen-Jaya, Tokyo, Japan, Akira Kurusu!" "He entered this field almost through chance after false accusations against him forced him to leave his hometown, he soon entered into the care of the owner of Cafe Leblanc, tasked with cleaning dishes and soon being instructed in preparing coffee and curry, the main specialties of Cafe Leblanc. Time as a Looper has only aided his abilities, honing his craft, not just in preparing curry and coffee, but also aiding in expanding his horizons, soon providing new dishes that pair well with coffee and have drawn rave reviews from Loopers and non-Loopers alike as those taking the time to travel to Yongen-Jaya to experience Cafe Leblanc leave the Cafe with satisfied stomachs and higher knowledge of coffee than they did when they came in."

The Chairman said as he took it in before transitioning it into an interview as he said, "The famed Idol, Rise Kujikawa, and renowned model Ann Takamaki, regulars of Cafe Leblanc and fellow Loopers of the same branch have been very enthusiastic about the food on offer here and of the chef's talents..."

The interview in question showed both Ann and Rise sitting together as Ann said, "Akira's cooking has massively improved over time, his food was delicious as they were in our baseline but take in the Loops and all the work he's put into them, he makes some of the most delicious food one can have across Yggdrasil" with Rise soon following that statement up with a confident smirk on her face, "Akira's cooking is among the best that Yggdrasil has to offer and I'm not sure if I could name a person that could beat Akira in a cooking battle!"

"Interesting, confident in their friend's skills are they, well, let's see exactly what their friend is capable of here" The Chairman said in front of everyone present in Kitchen Stadium, sized up and filled with cooking appliances designed to be the best that Yggdrasil had to offer and filled with the finest ingredients from across the multiverse as the Chairman continued, "Entering the Kitchen Stadium, Chef at Cafe Leblanc in Yongen-Jaya, Tokyo, Japan, Akira Kurusu!" before gesturing to the red curtain entrance to Kitchen Stadium before it parted revealing, Akira Kurusu, dressed in a chef's version of his Phantom Thief outfit, black with red accents as he walked down the pathway to him before meeting the Chairman in the middle of the path with a handshake...

The Chairman smiled at seeing Akira here and asked him, "This is the first time I have invited someone from your branch to compete in my Kitchen Stadium" before gesturing over to the visitor's section where all the Loopers present rooting for Akira in this battle, which meant all of the Phantom Thieves, the Investigation Team, Maya Amano along with students from Seven Sisters High and students from St. Hermelin High along with the denizens of the Velvet Room, eager to watch Akira at work and to see him take on one of the best Chefs of the Multiverse letting Akira nod in appreciation to the section of supporters he had here as the Chairman continued, "Do you feel that puts added pressure on you to perform here today?"

Akira couldn't help but smile at that question and said, "I'm confident in my skills and I know I can beat anyone that you pair up against me" as the Chairman couldn't help but smile at hearing that response from Akira before soon speaking up himself...

"Throughout the many battles I have seen in my Kitchen Stadium amongst Loopers, I have bestowed on those I deem to be true leaders, masters, and innovators in the field of cooking the hallowed title of Iron Chef, and to truly test your mettle, I have assigned one Looper that I have bestowed that title upon them the honor of your first battle here in Kitchen Stadium..." The Chairman said with a smirk on his face before gesturing to an elevated podium within the Kitchen Stadium and said, "I summon forth, Iron Chef Soma Yukihira!" cueing the dramatic music as the banner behind the elevated podium soon lit up with an animated image of the Anchor hailing from the Totsuki Saryo Branch, as a spiky redhead soon rose up from the podium, dressed in a Navy Blue chef uniform, with the emblem of the Totsuki Culinary Academy on its back with a confident look on his face as applause rang out from the other attendees in Kitchen Stadium today and a look of nervousness on the face of all those present to root on Akira...

As the stadium announcer soon spoke up at this time, "Making his solo ascent into Kitchen Stadium, Looping Iron Chef Soma Yukihira, the Head Chef of Restaurant Yukihira, former 1st seat at the Elite Ten Council of Totsuki Culinary Academy and renowned culinary competitor, Soma enters this battle on a 7 battle winning streak against Loopers here at Kitchen Stadium, will Akira Kurusu be able to best him here in his first appearance here in Kitchen Stadium, we'll have to wait and see what's in store for us here today!"

Once the announcer was done reading that little speech, Soma soon stepped down from the podium and walked on over to his section of Kitchen Stadium, and said to Akira, "Ready to battle here? Kitchen Stadium can be intimidating when you battle here for the first time, but you'll get used to it with time and future experience..."

Akira nodded as he readied himself on his side of Kitchen Stadium and said to him, "I'm pretty sure I will" before soon eyeing up the Iron Chef outfit he had on and said, "What are the requirements of being named a Looping Iron Chef here?" as Soma put on a thinking expression...

"The base requirements for that are winning 5 battles here in Kitchen Stadium as a bare minimum, but also having consistent excellent performances with the theme ingredient for every battle you get put into. Honestly though, apart from that, you never know if the Chairman will award you with the title of Looping Iron Chef until he actually does" Soma said to Akira who had a thinking expression on his face before he looked up at the Chairman who was about to reveal the theme ingredient as Soma had the very strong feeling that Akira had just got a main goal taking over him as the Chairman soon commanded attention with his next set of words...

"The challenger here is well regarded across the multiverse, out of his mastery of curry and coffee and those specialties made for a rather difficult decision in choosing which ingredient to choose for this battle. Do I choose an ingredient to take the challenger out of his element and see how well his innovative abilities and imagination can take him here in my Kitchen Stadium, or do I pick an ingredient that plays into his specialty in order to see exactly for myself why the Multiverse raves over his food?" Chairman Kaga mused to those in attendance and the two chefs about to do battle here as Akira noted that coffee was indeed present amidst the regular ingredients present here, having a strong feeling about what the Chairman picked...

"With that in mind, I went with the latter, but make no mistake, depending on your performance here today, I will have you back here and tested even further...Now in regards to Japanese curry, the three main proteins are pork, chicken, and that ingredient..." The Chairman smiled before soon pulling off the tarp concealing the ingredient as he said, "I now unveil the secret ingredient!" Letting the podium underneath the tarp raise up the secret ingredient as both Akira and Soma smiled wide as they caught sight of very high-quality cuts of the theme ingredient spotting ribs, sirloin, and other miscellaneous cuts such as tongue and shanks on the podium...

"The theme ingredient of this battle is Beef!" Chairman Kaga said with a gleeful tone in his voice as Soma and Akira began to think quickly in their head over what recipes they would use with this ingredient, as the implication being that Kaga deliberately chose this ingredient

to see what Akira's curry was like, so he was expecting that as Soma was thinking of his own curry recipe for one of his dishes to counteract that...

With their recipes locked in their heads, all that Soma and Akira could do now was wait for the Chairman to call out, "Allez Cuisine!" and with the sound of the gong that erupted immediately after those words were uttered, Akira and Soma ran quickly up to the main podium to collect their cuts of beef before grabbing other supplementary ingredients to their respective kitchens, with the audience watching eagerly to see what these two Looping chefs would do with this beef...

[Persona 5]
Pandora's Box – Sophia's Awakening
Author: Wookywok

"Ow."

Ren Amamiya AKA Akira Kurusu AKA Joker was no stranger to Waking Up in less-than-ideal scenarios. He'd suddenly regained his memory in the middle of just about every Palace, Jail, film, and whatever else he'd already been in, quite frequently at the worst possible time.

As far as Waking Up in the Shibuya Jail immediately after being dumped into the underground by Shadow Alice went… frankly, this was only a 4 out of 10 on the 'Shit, This Sucks' scale, mostly just due to how much the landing frickin' *hurt*.

Joker groaned, trying to ignore how sore he was as he got up off of Skull. "Ugh… everyone alright?"

Skull grunted, bracing himself on the cold stone of the dump. "Yeah, just… gimme a moment. We kinda dropped like an Anchor there."

Mona was just fine, of course - he'd landed on his feet, like the cat he claimed not to be. He was sitting on one of the abandoned chairs, resting his scimitar over his shoulder. "You sure you didn't hit your head?" he said, a bit smugly. "You're sounding downright Loopy there."

"Good, we're all Awake," replied Joker, sending out a Ping. Ten answered back. He Unpocketed his phone, opening the chatroom.

…

Killing God With the Power Of Friendship And This Gun I Found - The Group Chat™

Panther: okay, like i get where you're coming from but a taco is not a sandwich i refuse to believe it

Oracle: riddle me this panther

Oracle: is a hot dog a sandwich

Panther: well

Panther: umm

Joker: just Woke Up, am in shibuya jail w/ mona & skull. theyre awake too

Panther: OH HI JOER

Oracle: joer

Joker: joer

Skull: joer

Panther: me when minor spelling mistake

Joker: yup

Joker: anyway, Awake we could be a while - we gotta grab sophie first obviously

Joker: also sound off if you're Awake

Skull: well you know i am

Noir: I'm here

Fox: I as well.

Panther: here

Queen: I'm Awake.

Oracle: here uwu

Mona: Never say that again, oracle

Oracle: u cant make me

Cow: I'm Awake

Cow: Who changed my name

Mona: im up, obvy

Wolf: I'm here too.

Joker: and if the fall didn't mess up my ability to count, igor makes eleven

Joker: sick

Joker: i'll keep you updated if weird stuff happens, meet you in the evening

Queen: Take care, Joker.

Oracle: don't turn into a space fetus!

Wolf: Don't… what?

Oracle: my references are wasted on you people

…

Joker stared in contemplation at the massive black box in front of him. Sure, it was geometrical. Sure, it was colored a shiny obsidian black. But he wasn't sure he'd call it a *monolith*. Too cubical. What it *was* was sticking out like a sore thumb among the mountains of discarded desks and school supplies.

He still didn't know why Sophie had taken the form of a box before being activated. He was no cognitive psientist.

Joker turned to his teammates, standing beside him. "Cover your eyes, guys. It's gonna get bright."

The leader of the Phantom Thieves closed his eyes and placed his hand on the box, light shining through his eyelids as the container dissolved into pixels.

…

REBOOTING
SOPHIA Ver1.37

STARTING NEURAL NETWORK…
LANGUAGE… OK
MOTOR… OK
SENSORY… OK
VISUAL… OK

MEMORY…

MEMORY FOUND. INITIALIZING…

Yo!

…

Self-diagnostic scans weren't Sophia's favorite thing in the world. They were, quite frankly, a tedious affair that required too much processing power to be comfortable. But, for an AI such as her, they were a necessary evil - especially after crashing like she had.

At least, Sophia was fairly certain she had crashed. There was no other logical explanation, after all; one moment Sophie was helping out in Ichinose's lab, the next she was… wasn't. She didn't know *where* she was, her eyes were closed and she was putting all her processing power into the scan.

Speaking of, the scan was done. She reviewed the results, trying to figure out exactly what had caused her to need to reboot - but found nothing. All systems online and functional.

That… that didn't make sense. At all. If nothing was malfunctioning, how had she crashed? Why was she… where *was* she anyway?

Sophia opened her bright blue eyes - which widened as they noticed the masked grey ones staring right back at her.

"Joker?"

Sure enough, Joker was there, with a Thief at each side - all in their *Metaverse* attire. All of them looked distinctly surprised.

Sophia glanced at the other two. "Skull? Meowgana?"

Mona leveled a flat glare at her. "Okay: first of all, stop calling me that. Second: SOPHIE?"

"Wait, Sophie? You're *Looping*? For real?" asked Skull.

Sophie tilted her head quizzically. "I don't recall the term 'Looping' coming up during our excursions into the Jails. Is this new?"

Joker sighed, an awkward smile growing on his face. "Uh, yeah. We can explain, actually. Long story short, we're all time traveling against our will, we're back in Alice's Jail, and somehow our lives are even *crazier*. I'll fill you in on the details on the way to the exit."

Sophia smiled. "I'd like that."

…

Killing God With the Power Of Friendship And This Gun I Found - The Group Chat™

Oracle: i'm sorry but a durian would win!

Oracle: they're like the juggernaut of fruits

Wolf: I'm just saying, a coconut could take it. They're ridiculously durable.

Noir: Peaches would lose, they bruise too easily

Joker: i swear every time I look away the arguments manage to get even stupider

Joker: BUT! MUCH MORE IMPORTANT

Joker: all all all all all

Joker added Sophie to the group chat

Oracle: Five all pings this must bejkhfygbgjckhsfesjbfgjakx

Sophie: Yo, Phantom Thieves!

Oracle: kvn,gjkrueihsldfjlig SOPHIEEEEEEEEE

Queen: Oh! Has Sophie begun Looping?

Sophie: Yes! Joker explained to me the process of 'Looping'!

Panther: *Uploaded an image:*

Wolf: Well, I'll be.

Noir: It's so good to see you again, Sophie!

Fox: Indeed - it has been too long since last we saw you.

Sophie: Thank you!

Cow: Well, this isn't how I expected to spend this loop.

Sophie: …Cow? Who is 'Cow'?

Cow: Oh what have you DONE.

[Persona 4], [Persona 5]
Behind the Clouds – Sumire's Awakening
Author: Kaoupa

It was raining again.

This was hardly unusual. Earth - well, a lot of the planet got rain.

But to Sumire Yoshizawa, this rainstorm in particular meant a lot to her.

"Today was brutal, huh?"

Because her sister was in it too.

And she knew - intellectually - that she should be happy. She should be *happy that* her sister was right there.

But she didn't.

As Kasumi walked in front of her - for better or worse - all Sumire felt was numb.

Did - did I imagine everything?

"Feeling okay?"

She knew this scene. She knew - how *not* to act. To keep her sister alive.

But even as she walked forward, for a brief second, her treacherous mind whispered to her what would - or wouldn't - happen, if things didn't happen like they had.

Her friends. The first she'd made on her own. The Thieves - her Senpai –

"Sumire?"

Before Sumire could think any further, her sister stepped in front of her.

"You aren't talking. What's wrong?"

…

From the sidelines, Naoto Shirogane maintained a straight face, as she watched the Yoshizawa sisters interact.

It seemed that this would be another baseline Royal Loop - with her job keeping her busy, and Igor, Theodore, and Shinjiro the only other Awake Loopers (which was very odd, considering how many Loopers were in their Loop), well - interfering with the Thieves would be tricky, at best, since Shido was blackmailing Mitsuru again.

The Shadow Operatives, in short, couldn't really help. And Naoto's job made it hard for her to get the Thieves to trust her, in a Baseline Loop.

But trust or not, Naoto still had at least one thing to do in Tokyo to help the Thieves.

Sadly, saving Kasumi's life tended to make Sumire joining the Thieves less likely, and thus, made her less likely to Awaken - but saving Kasumi was the right thing to do.

…

"*What's wrong?"*

It was exactly the wrong thing to say.

Sumire - well, depression, in the end, was not something that you conquered in a day and a night. She had - gotten used to hers, started learning how to deal with it. But it wasn't *gone*.

And depression was something that usually could be fought off more easily with friends.

And having her sister back - well, she loved Kasumi, and she always would - But her sister had been a big part of what caused her depression.

The rain, her sister, *losing her friends* –

Sumire cracked.

"Go away!"

Bring - bring it back! BRING THEM BACK!

And without waiting for another word, even from her own mind, she ran.

As Sumire started to run, Naoto sighed, and quietly summoned a Shield of Justice, over the street and all of the pedestrians and cars.

And then, she did it again.

And then, again.

Best to be careful, and it wasn't like a few Shields of Justice was a big drain on her stamina at this point.

And it was usually easier to explain or overlook a child's miraculous survival after being hit by a car than it was everybody running into a force-field.

•••

Sumire should have known better than to run. She should have.

But there were too many emotions swirling through her head for her conscious mind to think clearly, as the street drew closer. Guilt. Shame. Confusion. Longing - for something, someone, or more than one person, or all of them, she wasn't sure –

"Hey, wait up!"

She didn't listen to Kasumi.

No matter how much she loved(hated/was angry with/wanted to slap/hug) her sister, she couldn't, at that moment, have heard anyone but herself.

"Look where you're going! The light's red!"

Her heart twinged back, with a sensation she wouldn't forget, that she *couldn't* forget.

She knew what was happening, but - her mind wasn't processing anything. Her conscious self just - couldn't handle it –

•••

There's a well-known fact about the Loopers from the Persona Loop.

Their conscious mind is - the part of them that makes the decisions, that shows restraint, that can think normally, that represents their *sanity* –

And that's probably the *least* dangerous part of their souls.

•••

Princess…

Sumire froze.

She wasn't sure if it was from shock, or - if her body had suddenly frozen at the command of her other self.

"Ella?"

"Sumire!"

Behind her, Kasumi ran up, visibly relieved that her younger (not really, but she didn't know that) sister had stopped running.

…

Not quite beside the two sisters, but well within (enhanced) hearing range (*so* very useful for detective work) Naoto tilted her head, curious now.

She knew that name.

She had played every game in her series multiple times, after all (and helped design remakes for 1, Innocent Sin, and Eternal Punishment using 40K technology - the result had been well worth the few decades she'd had to take away from detective work).

She had previously noticed that this seemed to be a standard Loop.

It would seem that, at the time, she had been operating with insufficient information.

Has she Awakened? A simple approach would be best.

This bore further investigation.

As Kasumi hugged her sister, and cars went by, Naoto watched patiently, idly weaving the Shields of Justice tighter around the two sisters.

Later, that was. Sumire - clearly needed some time to calm down.

Not that she would expect anything different, waking up to see the sister she had (correctly) thought died.

How should she approach this…

…

Ella was here.

Back in her room, Sumire still wasn't sure how to process that.

Ella was still with her - that was proof that she *had* changed. She could feel her Persona, nestled inside her - "talking" to her, in a sense.

Telling her that - that everything she'd gone through had *actually happened.*

But –

How had it happened - well, no?

Time travel was the obvious answer, since *Kasumi was alive,* but *why had she gone back in time at all?*

Even Ella had no answers. Which made sense - she was her, after all, and if Sumire didn't know, she wouldn't know either.

She was not well-read on - well, books that featured time travel, but - why *her?*

Obviously, it had something to do with the Metaverse - she couldn't think of any reason why somebody would send a

She wasn't the hero - that was definitely Ren-senpai. She - well, as far as newcomers went, she was definitely the newcomer to the Metaverse, but that just raised the question, again, of why somebody would pick *her* to do - whatever it was - when there were nine other people to pick who would probably do a better job than her.

Were they not available?

She - didn't even know what the heck had happened, or *how.*

She had been smiling at Senpai in the train station before he went back home, and then - she had been walking down the street in the rain, with, again, *no idea what had happened.*

She didn't think it was anything Doctor Maruki had done, he didn't have his powers.

Senpai had mentioned a "god of control", but she didn't think he wanted to talk much about it.

…wait

Well - maybe - what if the god of control went back in time, but couldn't go alone? If it had to pick someone who could oppose it, why not pick *her?*

If - well, Senpai said the Thieves had fought it, and defeated it, but - wait, Senpai defeated it before Doctor Maruki got his powers, because it died on Christmas Eve –

Hello, Sumire Yoshizawa.

Sumire was not proud enough to deny, in the future, that she yelped when Naoto Shirogane first made mental contact with her.

She would, however, deny that she yelped loudly enough her parents and sister all poked their heads into her room and saw her talking to herself.

The stammering red face that tried to assuage them was probably what kept them from making an appointment with Maruki.

…

Fifteen minutes later, Sumire was still lying down on her bed, body still recovering from practice, and her mind now recovering from the deluge of information that she had received.

And from seeing Naoto Shirogane teleport into her bedroom, and then getting warped to a town called Inaba in the middle of nowhere, then into the Velvet Room, before her new companion had finished her day by bringing her back home, and more firmly establishing their new psychic link.

So I - went back in time because - the multiverse is broken, and I'm supposed to think of it as a giant computer-tree, because I don't have the context to understand it better right now?

Don't worry about not understanding it that well. Naoto's mental voice came, in a reassuring manner. *It can take centuries for people to understand Yggdrasil better, no matter what point they start from.*

And - Igor-san, Lavenza's - master - is the Anchor? There are four other groups of Persona-users that I haven't met yet - and all *the other Thieves Awoke before I did?*

Sumire was reasonably sure that - well, she wasn't sure how to explain the - whatever it was that Naoto sent over their connection, but she was pretty sure it wasn't negative.

That isn't your fault, Sumire. Yggdrasil is - among many other things - extremely fickle, and has a strange sense of humor. Loopers typically activate based on how close they are to the Anchor, but that's no guarantee. Lavenza, Elizabeth, Theodore, and Margaret - depending on how you look at it, they're either Igor's children or his subordinates. Or both. Either way, Theodore and Lavenza didn't wake up until after Akira did, and Akira wasn't - well, the Palaces are an Expansion, from Igor's point of view, and most of the Attendants existed before Akira did.

Right, that was something she would - have to get used to. Senpai went by Akira, now. Even if he would apparently understand it if she used "Ren", it would apparently be rude, usually.

But at the moment, he *was* Ren… this was going to get confusing fast.

That's normal, trust me.

Oh, thank you - Shirogane-senpai? Um… is it wrong, that I wish one of the other Thieves was Awake? Even if it was Zenkichi-san or Sophia-chan.

A friendly feeling came through the link.

I understand the feeling completely, Sumire. People tend to seek the comfort of familiar climates, in uncertain times - but don't worry. We'll be your friends too. Many of us understand the feeling of - having trouble connecting to others. Opening up and caring. Even if your exact circumstances are - understandably uncommon, even for Loopers.

Yeah, I bet being brainwashed to think you are your dead sister is not something that happens often… Sumire pondered.

…more than you might think. Came Naoto's blunt response.

I'll… take your word for it? Sumire thought back.

If nothing else, Shinjiro wants to speak to you. Naoto added.

From… the Shadow Operatives? Why? Sumire asked, curiosity clear.

He wants another apprentice chef to teach. He's been waiting for quite a while…

Okay! Well - I'll be happy to meet him when I have the time? How would I get to - Tatsumi Port Island and explain it to my parents?

He can teleport over and get you whenever you like. Naoto replied.

…*right.* Sumire thought back.

Looper.

Indeed.

Chapter End Notes

This is the last chapter so far! As in, there are no snips after that last one written yet. From now on, I will upload whenever there are about 10k words written as opposed to whenever is most convenient for me. On the other hand, with well over 300k words worth of content I don't think you'll get bored!

I hope you enjoyed the trip so far! Please don't hesitate to share your opinions here or join us on Spacebattles!

Miscellaneous 25

Chapter Notes

These are all the snips for now. Enjoy!

[Persona 2], [Fate/Grand Order]
Eldritch Metropolis of Rumours: Sumaru – part 27
Author: me (HelenTheMoon a.k.a. Lermis)

Chapter 7.5 section 4: Just Scratching the Surface
Area: Yumezaki, Club Zodiac

Having Yukino with them was… odd. Oh, she definitely looked like she could handle herself in a fight, but a fight against demons? That was another thing entirely. Still, she seemed to be all for fighting the Triads. In fact, when Katsuya asked her about it, she threw some line about "zombies, theater girls, and cyber goons" that was frankly *really* concerning.

"So, what does this Triad thing have to do with the Joker?"

"None, that we know of" admitted Katsuya. "However, it is another case that has yet to be officially investigated. And we have an eyewitness reporting several suspicious persons leaving the scene."

"More Triad goons?"

"No, a rather miscellaneous group."

"Sounds weird but not that urgent."

"Honestly, Miss Mayuzumi, while I would like to have JOKER taken in as soon as possible, we really don't have any leads about where he might have gotten."

"Damn, he escaped *that* fast?"

"You have *no* idea" muttered Ulala. The fucker could teleport.

Against all odds, Yukino *smiled.* "I think this is gonna be fun."

What's her definition of "fun"?

Nobody asked her that question out loud though. Besides, they had just arrived.

Club Zodiac would not officially open its door for business for another hour or so, but it was open. Inside a few staff members were cleaning and organizing their inventory, preparing themselves for yet another busy night. A TV was blaring in the background at some random channel just to provide some background noise. There were a few high schoolers loitering around the entrance, but mostly staying out of the way. They threw their group suspicious looks as they walked in; none of them looked like the sort to frequent this place.

Katsuya approached the register, where a young man with bleached blond hair was tidying up. "Excuse me…"

The young man turned only to blanch when he saw a police badge waving at his face?

"Um, hi, um…"

He's anxious about something… "I'm Detective Suou Katsuya of Sumaru PD. I'd like to ask you some questions."

"Hold up, Suou? Do you know a guy named Tatsuya?"

Katsuya was enough of a professional to hide his scowl. "Yes, he's my little brother. I know he's a regular, that's not why I'm here."

"Oh, so, uh… you heard… nothing from him?"

They were getting sidetracked. Katsuya knew that, and yet. "No, I have not seen him in a couple of days." Tatsuya's rebellious phase was currently at its worse, and he was legally an adult now. Katusya was not surprised he decided not to come home for a day or two.

"Shit… look man, your bro's been acting really freaky."

"What do you mean?"

"Well… fuck, not sure what I should tell you."

"Is he alright? Does he have something to do with the Triads? Did they do something to him?"

"The Triads? Fuck, I hope not. But it was on the same day. Some cop lady – Mashiro? Miyashiro? Something like that – popped up and locked herself in the back. Talked to another regular for a bit then said some shit about the JOKER and locked herself in the back. Told us to call no-one. Then Su- um, Tatsuya popped up, took my boken and went to the back too. Next thing I know, he's out with the lady, a real sword, and they both smell like fire and some shit I don't even know. And then they just vanished. Now two of the rooms in the back are completely ruined, we won't be able to use them for *weeks*!"

"…"

...What? Just… what? Tatsuya… another police officer… and JOKER? What the, but… "But we had no leads…"

"I don't know man. Like I said, he was acting really fucking weird. Talked cryptic and shit."

Maya stepped up. "Do you know someone who may know? Katsuya-san here is really worried for him."

"Um, yeah, I think. Yoshizaka. Ah- Anna Yoshizaka. Tatsuya and the cop lady talked to her for quite a bit."

Katsuya might as well have been slapped. They *just talked* to Yoshizaka. And she said *nothing*. Did- did she send them here hoping they would find out? What was she aiming at? Was she clueless as well? Was she *hiding* Tatsuya? And there was another police officer involved in this?

"Breaking News."

Katsuya was snapped out of his spiraling thoughts by the broadcast.

"A gun fight broke out a few minutes ago at the Aerospace Museum at the Konan district, causing significant structural damages and setting fire to the museum. Eyewitnesses report two suspects fleeing the crime scene. Authorities and fire fighters are already on site."

…

Area: Konan

The fire on the Aerospace museum made the news. It would be impossible to hide anyway. The media was already on the police's tail for "not having any evidence" regarding the JOKER case. In Eikichi's uncharitable and well-informed opinion, they wanted any kind of reason *not* to investigate the JOKER, so they turned to the museum fire, right at their porch. Not to mention, the media had somehow gotten wind of the fire being a result of a *fight*. Undoubtedly either Jun or the tickets lady decided to spill the beans, and the media followed suit.

Fortunately, Eikichi's honestly distinct Visual Kei look did not make it to the media, though he could not be too sure about Baofu's website. He was fairly certain Jun would not spill the beans about Eikichi being there – he was far too respected at school for that. But he could not be so sure about the tickets lady.

He also had no guarantee that the two would not spill the beans about *Tatsuya*; unlike with Eikichi, Unawake This Side Jun had no loyalty towards him. Hell, at least one person seemed already aware of Tatsuya's involvement in the fire.

His phone had been ringing with Anna Yoshizaka's number almost non-stop. Eikichi had been forced to turn off the device so they would not attract attention.

Hah. As if having to carry Tatsuya over to Miyashiro's house did not attract a ton of attention already.

At first Eikichi considered carrying him to the Velvet Room, but they had to cross a central street to do so. A delinquent carrying another unconscious delinquent would definitely get

them noticed. Maya's house was also out, as she was Unawake. So at one point Tatsuya handed everyone keys to Miyashiro's apartment. Far from the safest location, but at least they would not have police on their ass here.

As he lugged Tatsuya in the apartment, for the umpteenth time he thanked his massive strength stat. He tossed his friend to the couch as gently as he could, and then took a deep breath.

Time to deal with the other of Tatsuya's confidants.

He went to the bathroom, turned on his friend's phone, and immediately was assaulted by a staggering number of unanswered calls from Anna Yoshizaka.

Better text her. He did not want to wake Tatsuya and he was not sure how she would react to a call. He debated what he should send her for a moment before settling for honesty.

"This is Eikichi Mishina. Ta-chan is knocked out. Yes, I know everything, long story. That mark on his hand got the better of him, he'll be fine."

He did not mention anything about the fire. He knew better than to record his crimes in writing.

The phone rang with a text back.

"prove it"

"Does your phone accept pictures?"

"not that rich"

Fair enough. Camera phones were a really new invention.

"OK fine. We're at the cop lady's place." Tatsuya DID tell her where he was staying, right?

A few moments passed. Somehow, Eikichi was dreading them. The text that followed did nothing to alleviate them.

"Heads up, I sent his brother and some friends to the club. Some weirdoes Suou never heard of attacked the Triads there. I think the bartender talked to brother Suou. They may be coming your way."

Well.

Shit.

...

Katsuya left the bar with his head reeling.

"Oi, Suou! We were there to ask about the Triads! We learned nothing about them!"

Outwardly, he did not react to Ulala's complaining. Too frozen in shock. Everything was happening at once. Tatsuya was involved in the *JOKER* case? Of all things? And a fellow officer knew about it?

"I have to find Tatsuya."

"And how are we going to do THAT? Ask this Yoshizaka girl? *She* isn't talking." And wasn't THAT one of the biggest wrenches thrown at him today.

"Didn't that bar guy mention some other cop?" interjected Mayuzumi Yukino. "Mashiro? Miyashiro? You can ask her."

"Then let's investigate!" cheered Maya. "Change of plans everyone! We are going to find this cop lady, and tell us where Tatsuya is, so Katsuya-kun isn't worried anymore!"

She winked at him. Katsuya short-circuited. "Um, Miss Maya!"

"Nope! No complaining! We're going after your brother. You always have to make sure your family is safe, right?"

Yukino emphasized this with a decisive nod.

Despite everything, Katsuya felt a sense of relief. "Alright. Thank you. Let's find this person. Then we can find Tatsuya and then JOKER."

"Hold up" said Ulala "didn't they kick you out of the JOKER case? You can't go around in the PD asking about them."

"That's why we're asking about certain officers instead!" said Maya. "Katsuya-san is just worried for his little brother!"

"I mean, that's true but-" How did she manage to be so cheerful?

"It's decided! Let's go! Let's think positive!"

It was hard to feel bad around Maya.

[Persona 5], [RWBY]
No means NO.
Author: Kaoupa

"No."

"Uh - what?"

Sumire Fall - better known in her home Loop as Sumire Yoshizawa - gave Ruby Rose a very flat look, as in the background, an Unawake Neo and Roman Torchwick writhed in the grasp of Ella.

"Senpai and Igor-sensei told me about you. And I don't want to be a part of your family."

"WHAT is wrong with-" Ruby began to speak, a defensive huff entering her voice.

"I already have a sister!" Sumire snapped. "And - adopted sisters, and adopted brothers - and whatever Senpai is… and my mom changes every Loop, if she's even alive, my twin sister - I-I already have so many things to deal with and I don't need to make them more complicated!"

Sumire took a deep breath, then sighed. She was shaking her head back and forth, even as she looked back up. "I'm sorry, Ruby-senpai. But - I just have so much already to deal with - and I know your family has adopted Cinder-senpai - but I just can't. I'm sorry."

"Okay."

"I - huh?" Sumire blinked, looking back up.

"You - well, good luck, with your stuff." Ruby Rose said simply. "I know the Persona Branch has a lot of Loopers, but they're - well, they just mostly talk to each other? I mean, they're nice, and they're nice friends, but they - don't draw attention?" Ruby shrugged. "I guess I should have thought about that more…"

Sumire nodded. "Yes! Everyone's been wonderful, but -" she sighed. "That means I have to get used to having a new family on top of my blood family."

Ruby's smile was very genuine, after hearing that.

[Persona 3], [Persona 5]
All The Cards Are Wild (Unrepentant Fools)
Author: Kaoupa
Status: REJECTED – NO NON-CANON WILD CARDS

"IT'S!"

"THE!"

"SEES! CREW!"

"AGAAAAIIINNNN!"

"BOOMA-BOOMA!"

"BOOMA-BOOMA!"

And as the show ended, Sumire couldn't suppress her giggles as the Specialized Extracurricular Execution Squad stepped off the stage of the Velvet Room's theatre.

(She was nine years old (physically) at the moment, it was normal for her to giggle!)

"Couldn't we have done a Phoenix Rangers live show instead?" Yukari groaned, as she walked down the aisle.

"Sumi-chan didn't ask for a Phoenix Rangers show, Yuka-tan!" Junpei Iori retorted, top hat still on his head. "She asked for the Muppets!"

"Ugh… I know…" Yukari muttered to herself. Before her mind could sink back into being cast as Miss Piggy after losing a bet, a friendly hand on her shoulder snapped her out of the funk.

"Hey there! Don't worry, remember?"

Yukari couldn't stop herself from grinning back at her fellow (part-time) redhead.

(Even if her relationship with Makoto Yuki (or, at the moment, Kotone Shiomi) could never be described as anything but complicated, it could also never be described as anything but loving - what form that love took will not be clarified here).

Anyways, as SEES returned to their table, Igor returned to the stage, and the microphone that had appeared out of nowhere.

"Thank you, all - both guests and attendants - for coming to our dual celebration. Both for the release of Persona 3 Reload - and the overdue welcome of our newest Looper, Sumire Yoshizawa, to the Velvet Room!"

Sumire - well, smiled, ever so awkwardly, even as Ella, Vanadis, and Cendrillon smiled from the inside of her mind, the new Trickster's Personas beaming with pride as applause - not overwhelming, but definitely spirited and proud (proud of *her!)* - spread through the room.

It wasn't the world stage that she had reached a few times, but this was every bit as good.

…

"Now then, dear guest. What kind of Persona do you desire?"

As she stood (pointedly to the side of the hospital bed that she had been strapped down in when she first got to visit the Velvet Room on her own), Sumire frowned. "...well, what Persona nullifies the most types of attack naturally?"

Igor's smile did not change. But besides him, Lavenza's did. "Ah! If I might make an assumption - do you seek to create your first Persona that may nullify all your foes in our world?"

Despite the knowledge that what she had been thinking of had been done before, Sumire nodded. "What - well, what do you think would work best?"

"Hmm…" Lavenza murmured. "While I may not speak of your fellow guests - at least, without their permission to release that information - I must remind you, that every Wild Card's Personas and Journeys are different. And the Shadows they face as well - and the

elements that all wield. I cannot guarantee that any Persona you can create will truly protect you from all of your foes."

"I know that." Sumire replied. "I can't do everything by myself."

Then, she smiled.

"But that's - well, that's what we've all got each other for!"

"So - your dad was your Hierophant, right?"

Ryuji's question made Sumire blink, but she nodded quickly, after the words he'd said had taken the requisite second for her brain to process them. "Yeah! Dad was my Hierophant link. Who was yours?"

(It - well, asking other Loopers about the Journey that made them a Wild Card wasn't something that was frowned upon. It was just - well, Sumire had never gotten around to it.)

(And she was still playing through the altered Persona 4 Golden version of Naoto's Journey - Futaba and Fuuka hadn't even designed her game yet!)

"Old man Igor."

Sumire blinked, brought back to reality, in genuine surprise. "Igor-dono?"

"Yeah. He - well, he might not do much in person, but it's nice to have someone who's always there to listen, you know?" Ryuji shrugged. "It's…" The blonde-dyed delinquent caught himself midsentence, gazing at the ground.

"Ryuji-senpai?" Sumire asked, curiosity clear in her voice.

Ryuji sighed. "...sometimes I wonder if that's what the Hierophant's supposed to be. What… having a good dad's like."

…Sumire would admit later that she had no shame whatsoever in not knowing how to respond to that.

[Persona 5], [NiER: Automata], [RWBY]
W[e]ight of the world
Author: Venku

Akechi Awoke. The man ignored the standard urge to add panache to that statement. Even with time reset, having met the original Detective Prince, and forced to eat his callsign, some things remain. One of them was the flourish of the past.

Before accessing his Loop Memories, a Ping was sent. Waiting to see the response, the man checked said memories. Mm. Interesting. The setup would play into the child of him: an alien invasion and most of humanity dead. Eight replies came back, causing the man to raise his eyes in response.

"I don't know if I should hate or be grateful for so many responses," he muttered. Suppressing the residual traits of his base personality, Akechi adopted a cheerful facade that served him well for a while. Stepping outside, his hand went to his eyes to take in his surroundings.

As he stepped outside, his surroundings were more in line with post-apocalyptic settings. Most of the landscape was destroyed, with makeshift shelters erected. This Loop had Akechi assigned as an android in a resistance movement on Earth. Putting on the Detective Prince mask, he approached the twin redheads in the middle of the camp.

Devola and Popola were two androids assigned to the Gestalt project ages ago. The Gestalt project was formed, Akechi remembered, after a hole was punched in the sky over Shinjuku, Japan. There was a man on a dragon chasing another being in the sky. After the being was killed, the JSDF destroyed the man on a dragon. This introduced, via the actions of the JSDF, a new disease.

The event reminded Akechi of when Yaldabaoth merged reality with the cognitive world. There was one difference, as fatalities were skipped in his Baseline. Aware of how it could have happened, Akeci remembered both Devola and Popola were responsible in due course for reintroducing the soul to the body, the goal of Gestalt.

Akeci remembered how Gestalt ended, of how Nier and his *friends* ignored the goal and sought to rescue his sister. Akechi's feelings about friends warred with the amusement of what happened. What didn't make him happy was the scapegoat of all Devola and Popola models.

Living as an outcast due to his mother and her assumed profession made him experience a strange feeling. Empathy.

This is why he was polite while speaking with both, offering to help with anything.

...

Devola tried to rip off his hand when he reached for a jug of desert wine. It was amusing in the camp to see the two fight. It was less funny to see Akechi apologize for starting a scene.

As penance, Akechi was in the Desert region sifting for some junk Popola requested. Some of the Machines tried to pick a fight. Loki and Robin Hood dismissed their feeble attempts to stop him. Akechi was dressed in his Black Mask attire, reflecting his mood, when he picked up a warning sensation.

Loki had a skill. This skill was called Evade. It gave him a subtle warning when he was attacked. It triggered, and Akechi jumped to the side. Scanning to see who attacked him.

"Crow," the voice spoke. Turning to face the person standing there, Akeki smirked. Regardless of the era or time, he would always recognize the person standing there. Cropped hair, with glasses and a knowing smirk, the look of his longtime rival was there.

"Akira, what's going on?" Akechi asked. While trying to find an answer, Akechi charged at Akira. This was also nothing new. When both were awake, their base rivalry came to the

surface. Each competed to prove they were the best.

Bonds can form from love, friendship, or combat.

While Akira and Akechi fought, Akira gave more information about the Branch. Akira informed him of the gods of this Branch, called Drakengard, and how humanity suffered due to the Pride of one man. While this was ongoing, so too was the fight.

Both men ignored the arrival of a third human. A small woman appeared, no older than fifteen. Short-cropped hair, a long cape, and loose-fitting battle attire completed her outfit. The woman's weapon, a scythe, folded itself into a sniper rifle. Crescent Rose was held in the woman's hand as she aimed at both men. Two shots rang out.

Akira and Akechi's cheeks were grazed.

"What the fuck!" Crow called out.

Ruby giggled. "Your friend Oracle said you were out here. C'mon. I'll explain everything. And if you wanna fight, I'll be willing."

...

Futaba Sakura. Oracle. The Navigator for the Phantom Thieves of Heart as well as a Looper, was currently sitting in her Persona, a manifestation of her Will. The Persona, known as Al Azif, was a floating silver triangle based off of the Lovecraftian Mythos.

Futaba was within, directing one of the combatants on the ground.

"Ok A2. What you wanna do is run to the right of...hey! Are you hacking me?!?"

The last was called out to the other combatant. Called 9S, the only male outside of Akira was working on a display monitor, attempting to break into Al Azif. The warning was ignored as 9S was briefly electrocuted and tossed back into a nearby tree.

Those three were at an oasis in the desert. Nearby was a tall statuesque woman in white, talking to a younger woman wearing glasses. Another woman, dressed in a goth lolita outfit, was resting on a pair of stilts while a robotic POD unit was pulling fish out of the water.

"Statement: 9S seems to want to antagonize A2" the grey pod spoke to the woman in goth. Before 2B could respond, another voice chimed in.

"Those two have been fighting like siblings since going online." This woman, dressed in white and called Commander White spoke out. "We just clear a berth when they're awake." As she spoke, A2 was currently seeking to drown 9S in the water, while his POD unit flailed helplessly.

"Should we intervene?" the brown-haired woman in glasses called out.

"No need," 2B called out. "Oracle? If it gets critical please teleport both onto the rock. Or in the middle of a machine nest."

"Ok!" Futaba called out.

This scene was what Ruby, Akira, and Akechi witnessed. As Akira ran to the water to give 9S a hand, Ruby looked up at Akechi.

"So. Do you remember how I said anchors were always Awake?" she asked quietly. With Akechi's nod, Ruby continued to speak. "It can wear on you. Being awake for all eternity alone."

"This," she waved her hand, is an attempt of the Locals to give their anchor a sense of friendship. She's been Awake for local time over 10,000 years." At that, Akechi winced in sympathy.

"I came along out of understanding and my sister back home found the fish cute. Your acquaintances for the same reason."

"I don't mind helping," Akechi replied, raising up his hand. "As much as it pisses me off to admit, Akira and his people saved me. If I was saved, I don't want others to suffer." A bit of a psychotic smirk flashed on Akechi's face as he replied. "I'mma help the woman. But I got a cost."

At that statement, Ruby raised her eyebrows.

"Akira and I fight later before this Loop ends. And you tell the natives I want the redheads in camp to have their name cleared."

Ruby nodded. "I don't think you need me to tell them. I think your friend knows." At that Al Azif flashed it's back lights in acknowledgement. "I can see what I can do for those two. Baseline they redeem themselves but at a cost."

"If we're helpin' the Anchor we're helpin' them" Akechi replied, in a tone of finality. Being in their shoes, he wanted to give Devola and Popola a way out if possible.

Ruby lifted her hand in acquiescence. Nodding, Akechi ran to the fight, calling out support for A2.

Ruby and Accord, the two Anchors, smiled seeing the attempts of two Branches to do one thing.

Lift a Weight of the World off an Anchor's shoulders.

[Persona 5]
Bonds
Author: Venku

The being known as Igor held many titles. Anchor of the Persona side of the Amalaverse. Master of the Velvet Room. Minder of the siblings Elizabeth, Theodore, Margaret, and Lavenza. An overall group chaperone of those who arose to deal with a terrible fate. Believer in the will of Man to choose their Fate, to make amends.

It was for that reason he was sitting across from a young man. Goro Akechi was a Looper. Currently garbed in his school uniform, the young man had requested this meeting when he awoke. Five people responded to his Ping, and each made themselves known. Margaret was guiding the Investigation Team through their Arena battles, while Lavenza stood behind him as an attendant. Zenkichi was outside as he delivered Akechi to the Looping Velvet Room, while Akira made plans to neutralize Shido.

"Is it my understanding that you wish to see what the cards might have in store, young man?" Igor asked. With Akechi's nod of understanding, Igor did a three-card spread.

The Tower was drawn, and Igor spoke. "With the blessing of Looping, the Tower can symbolize destruction, higher learning, and liberation, " he added. The second card was Death. Taking his time, Igor spoke thus: "A potential for all. Death signals that there is a new beginning. As things die, others take over." A final card, Justice, was flipped. Igor looked at Akechi. "I do not need to clarify what Justice signifies, do I?"

Goro shook his head. While not taking stock in the Arcana, he could not argue that Akira drew power from each Tarot cad. The man sought further clarification from multiple sources.

While he rose, Igor spoke. "Young Akira shared his time in the Drakenngard branch. You felt empathy for two women unjustly persecuted." Surprised, Goro spoke. "What of it?"

"Just this," Lavenza spoke. "Baseline, Futaba Sakura speculation you could not form bonds outside of the Trickster and Shido." Ignoring the stiffened spine, she continued. "While the False God gave you the ability on par with the Trickster, you squandered it. Instead of letting it grow, you let it fester, seeking your brand of Justice. You felt empathy for Devola and Popola. Ruby Rose mentioned an Anchor's curse. Master gave you a Tarot reading."

Yellow eyes stared at Goro. "Perhaps you have the answers you seek."

Goro left, not yet willing to face some uncomfortable questions. The last words he heard this Loop from Igor: "The Velvet Room always remains open if you have questions."

Outside, Zenkichi was busy smoking. Seeing Goro arrive, he crushed his smoke and looked at the other man. "You seem to have issues, Crow" he replied, seeing Goro's pensive look.

Deciding on a whim to start change, to catch up to Akira, Goro nodded.

"Want to talk about it?" Zenkichi asked, not expecting a response.

Goro shrugged. "My apartment? We can discuss lunch and how we can help Joker take down Shido's group."

Zenkichi stammered, looking surprised for a moment before nodding.

Goro followed the older man. If Long Nose and Creepy Girl suggested he start talking to more people, he figured it couldn't hurt. Not if it let him fight Joker on an even footing.

[Persona 3], [Persona 5]
The Kid Joker of Tatsumi Port Island
Author: VS21 (edits done by me)

"You know it's been a long while since I've Looped into Tatsumi Port Island" Akira Kurusu mused to himself as he laid down on his bed in the dorm he had at the start of the Loop, idly bouncing a ball in one hand, while using his other hand to pet Morgana on his head.

Morgana was in cat form relaxing on his stomach. "Yeah, speaking for myself and from what I've heard from the other Phantom Thieves, we haven't Looped into Tatsumi Port Island for quite a while, Looping in Inaba or having you guys show up in Yongen-Jaya or general Tokyo while we're normally active is more normal for us."

Akira nodded in agreement from hearing that. He turned his attention to the ball that he was idly bouncing in his other hand and continued to bounce it for a while before turning his attention to his dorm roommate and quickly passed the ball to him, watching him catch it as he asked, "By the way Ken, how long do you think it'll take for SEES to come in, recruit us, and move us out of the Elementary School dorms?"

Ken Amada had caught the ball that Akira tossed his way and immediately began to do a round of Keep-Up with his feet, bouncing it around, mimicking the same routine that Conan Edogawa normally did with a soccer ball as he said, "Well normally when Ikutsuki discovers that I have the potential to wield a Persona, he makes the move to have me move into the SEES dorms around the summer, and unfortunately for us, we're in early April right now. Right around the same time that our Wild Card Leader for the Loop, whether if its Makoto/Minato, Kotone/Minako, or someone else entirely coming to Gekkoukan and moves into the SEES dorms. Which means, unless you're up to really go and make some waves early on to get us spotted and moved in faster than in my Baseline, it'll mean that the two of us are staying here as a ten and eleven-year-old with a kitten that we're trying to hide from the dorm mother." Ken soon let the ball drop on the ground after he finished talking and motioned to Akira as he was on his bed, as Akira was a little younger than Ken this Loop, a common occurrence for the Phantom Thieves of Hearts whenever they Awoke in Iwatodai, all of them being roughly the same age or younger than Ken, due to the time periods of their respective adventures with Personas lining up that way to begin with...

Akira moved his arms to make sure to pet Morgana a bit as he was lying down on his chest, for this Loop Morgana was a kitten, something that happened to him at times when he also Looped into Iwatodai, though it hadn't happened to him for the last couple of Loops here that he had as Ken said to Akira, "It's also good to Loop together with you, I don't think we've had a Loop together since SEES watched you battle in Kitchen Stadium with the other Loopers in our branch, that was a fantastic battle, Shinjiro was taking notes throughout the battle and in the overtime tiebreaker for recipes."

This got Akira to smile in response and say, "Thanks, tying Soma in Battle Beef was a tight battle, and I'm pretty sure the fact that the judges preferred the beef Leblanc Curry and Coffee combo I made over the curry recipe that Soma put forth on his end was the main reason for that. But, getting Honey as the tiebreaker ingredient though, that was something that Soma was probably going to beat me on in just flat on experience."

Ken nodded at hearing that as he said, "If only Shinjiro was Awake, he had an idea for a dessert using honey after seeing what the two of you were able to come up with in that tiebreaker battle...Unless he or someone else Awakens later on during this Loop, it's probably going to be only us three Awake in the Loop."

Morgana took this opportunity to speak up from where he was laying on Akira's belly and said "Igor could be Stealthing but it's just as likely that it could be another Anchor that's also Stealthing since we only got the three Pings when we Woke up for the Loop" motioning with one of his paw to himself, Akira, and Ken as he said that...

Letting out a sigh as he heard that from Morgana, Akira soon sat up in his bed with Morgana moving off of Akira's chest as he did so, with Akira smoothing out his Gekkoukan Elementary uniform shirt as he let Morgana knead himself a place among the blankets right next to him as Ken asked Akira, "So then, if it's just the three of us, what exactly do you want to do for the Loop?"

Akira thought it over a bit before saying to Ken, "I've had some rather adventurous Loops as of late, I kinda just want to relax a little as a kid for the Loop, sleep a bit in class while still getting good grades, play around with friends in class, make pillow forts every night for bed kind of thing" as he shrugged his shoulders a bit after saying what he wanted to do for this Loop...

Ken heard that and said, "That sounds like a good plan, but I kinda want to add in something that'll really make this Loop go over the top for all of us" as he got up and began to look through his Pocket for an idea, before his eyes caught sight of the Featherman figures he had on his dresser as he Woke up in the Loop before chuckling and asked Akira, "Remember that Loop where you got the Phantom Thieves acting as a vigilante Featherman squad?"

Akira turned to Ken with a big smile on his face and said, "I most certainly do, still feeling a little jealous that you Woke up too late to really get to take part in it?"

Ken giggled and said, "A little but I've got an idea that just might make up for that a little, now I did some checking and I believe that Strega is operating their Revenge Request website ahead of schedule this Loop, but I've got an idea that'll definitely help us pass the time here for the Loop" as he came closer to Akira and Morgana for a conversation, something that all three of them were really liking the idea for...

…

A couple of nights later when the Dark Hour came around, while SEES was busy scouting out Tartarus and fighting against other minor SHadows outside the tower during the Dark House, Strega were making their way to deal with the latest target from the Revenge Request website, some random janitor of Gekkoukan Elementary School that pissed off some bigwig enough to make them put a nice, large bounty on his head, so with that Strega made their way to the Elementary School during the Dark Hour, heading right for where the request said the casket would be, with the janitor in question working the night shift there, with Takaya and Jin leading the way with Chidori staying behind a bit, keeping track of their surroundings as she soon called out, "Back up!" to both Takaya and Jin, with both of them looking confused at why she was calling for that before a bomb rolled down at the feet of the two male

members of Strega before it went off, blasting the two of them off in separate directions, sending Takaya smashing into a nearby wire fence, and Jin smashing right into a tree, as Chidori had taken steps back at seeing this, before soon looking up at the roof of the nearby Elementary school, and took notice of a kid standing at the top there, bouncing an unlit bomb in his hand, while dressed up in a purple and green shorts suit, with a white mask on his face and green hair...

Cackling at the sight of what that first bomb had accomplished, and petting the black kitten that was on his shoulders as he was bouncing the next bomb in his hands, the kid soon said, "Aww, did that little bomb startle all of you?" as another kid in a full black outfit, with a black and orange mask was standing behind the kid with the bomb.

Chidori couldn't help herself from calling out, "What was that for?"

The kid with a bomb soon said, "Simple you're on my turf and I quite have a liking for the janitor in the casket you're aiming to pry open!"

Takaya was able to pry himself from the fence and said, "Well we have a bounty on that man's head so you can back off you little brat!" as the kitten on the kid's shoulder soon yowled before striking at Takaya with a strong wind burst, slamming him up and down into the ground.

Jin called out, "Takaya!" and was surprised as the other kid in the black and orange mask was suddenly behind him with a spear to strike him hard in the back to knock him down to the ground...

With that left Chidori who was looking up at the kid on the roof, still bouncing that unlit bomb in his hand as she couldn't stop herself from asking, "Just who are you?"

She was completely taken aback by this kid who only smirked behind that mask of his and said, "You can call me Joker, now why don't you take your boys and leave this janitor out of it, otherwise..." and kept bouncing that bomb in his hand as a threat, as Chidori gritted her teeth and after seeing that both Takaya and Jin had been knocked out by that cat and the other kid was quick to call forth Medea to help her get Takaya and Jin away from the Elementary School as fast as they possibly could...

After checking with out of Loop powers to ensure that Strega were out of the way for now, Joker couldn't help but laugh hard, only to be joined by Morgana and Ken, also laughing hard in unison, with Ken taking off his black and orange mask as he said, "That was good!"

Joker soon took off his mask as he looked at Ken and said, "Yup, and like we talked about, we're gonna keep on doing this until Strega get too paranoid about potentially running into us that they shut down the Revenge Request website" as he gave Ken a high-five and made sure to give Morgana one as well...

"And if SEES do manage to pick up on our activities faster than normal?" Morgana asked them.

Ken said, "Well we all know Shadow Clones, we can just have those take the place of team Kid Joker in the meantime" before letting off a yawn.

Morgana quickly called out, "And with that, I think we're done for the night, go back to the dorm and into the pillow fort, it's time to go to sleep."

Joker rolled his eyes affectionately as he said, "Okay, okay" before soon leading the way for them to sneak back into their dorm building and back to their dorm room as the Dark Hour began to fade away for the night, with the clocks going past midnight as the three of them used magic to get out of their costumes and into pajamas for the night before relaxing together in their pillow fort before eventually falling asleep for the night, but if this night was any indication, this was going to be one fun loop for all three of them...

[Persona 5], [Doki Doki Literature Club], [Nier Automata]
Questions of the [H]eart
Author: Venku

The one thing, among many, that can be said about the Looping Literature Club is that they have seen a lot. As time itself is on repeat and reality can be screwy, it can be expected. Anything from variations of their name to apocalyptic settings has caused various protocols to be enacted. Even in rare situations.

Sayori Awoke. That measure of gravitas on such a simple phrase bore the reverence it invoked. As the Loop started, the Vice President closed her eyes and sent out a Ping. Seeing who else may be Awake received a total of five responses. "Interesting," the peach-haired woman responded.

Arriving at the school, Sayori noticed the other Literature Club members standing outside of the Club room. An eyebrow was lifted as she looked at Monika, their Anchor.

Monika motioned for Sayori to take a peek inside. "The second person I have a suspicion about their identity. If so, I wanted to leave it to you," the woman replied.

Sayori took a peek. Inside was a young male and a young female. The young male was in his late teens in appearance with white hair as well as a black choker being visible. The young woman had short, red, curly hair and was offering some quiet words to the other male.

Sayori, for her reasons, used an ability she was taught. As a Force User, Sayori or Darth Somnus was taught how to use the Force to pick up on emotions and words others may try to hide.

The red-haired girl was speaking, consoling the other youth. "I understand where you're coming from," the woman spoke. "I just do not think we can be of help."

"Even if reliving every time we are Awake the betrayals and murder?" The boy asked.

"Well, you did ask for some of it" the woman retorted. A small sigh. "That was rude but didn't you also tell her to continue to do her job?"

"Yes, but...."

It is at the man's response that Sayori interrupted. "Hi!" the peach-haired Doki greeted.

"Welcome to the Literature Club. I'm pretty sure you have some far-out branching poetry for us, right?"

Sayori used an acceptable passphrase to indicate they were Awake.

•••

Truthfully? None of the Dokis were initially too thrilled with one of the visitors. It wasn't the woman's personality or her demeanor. Haru Okumura from the Amalaverse was one of the most regal visitors they had. Yuri especially enjoyed sharing tea blends and recipes. Monika loved meeting a fellow gardener.

It was Haru's Baseline ability that put the Dokis on caution. As Baseline Monika used mental manipulation on the others, each Doki was leery of those with that ability.

Even if done chaotically, Haru Okumura was a part of a group that did mental manipulation. The Phantom Thieves of Heart were those who went after someone's cognitive self. To be a target, that person needed to have done egregious things. This ranges from abuse of authority to abuse of staff and covering up murders.

Ever since she was made aware of time and it being on reset, Haru noticed one thing. People did not object to her Persona or her ability. They objected to the actions of her colleagues, even if it was necessary.

•••

Tensions were reduced upon a sampling of a new tea blend. Akira, the leader of the Phantom Thieves, brewed a combination of Arrakeen Spice, Delphic Citrus, and a hint of spearmint in a tea infusion. Seeking to prove the man could do more than coffee, Akira asked the others to carry a sample in their Pocket and offer it in other Loops.

Yuri was an avid tea drinker and accepted this offering.

"What were you two discussing?" Natsuki asked as her girlfriend was drinking tea.

"This is..."

"..you can call me Nines" the man spoke. "From the Drakengard branch. Miss Okumura was offering a sympathetic ear as..."

Monika held up a hand. "You're not suffering Red Eye this Loop are you?"

•••

The Drakengard branch. Yuri was aware of it as her vampiric Sire Alucard was used to educate their Anchor. Natsuki was aware after a Loop as the Grotesquerie Queen. Sayori and

Monika?

The Cult of the Watchers fell under their irritation. Both for mind control, as well as Monika's "gods, are jackals" theory.

As such, the Looping Literature Club had a plan if any from that Branch visited. They'd not reject the search for knowledge nor download Literature for their Pocket.

Each Looper had to prove they were not susceptible to going Logic Virus for that route.

The Grima Patch kept possessions from going from Loop to Loop. That was known. The only Looper from the Automata side that did not get possessed was A2.

9S or Nines knew this. Didn't mean he wasn't irritated if having to pass a test.

Pass a test he did. Fights, including with Darth Somnus who knocked him out in four seconds, and Natsuki's Bakabane, were held. Once satisfied, Nines asked a question and a reason he and Haru were talking.

"How do you forgive a fellow Looper that killed you over ten times in Baseline? How do you forgive a Looper that killed your Mother figure in front of you, as well as your Lover, in Baseline?"

That question gave the Dokis pause.

[Persona 3]
Feeling Blue (and Red)
Author: Kaoupa

"Hello, master Makoto."

It really - well.

As he walked into the store, night falling outside, Makoto Yuki was not surprised to see an Attendant behind the counter.

(He'd seen Nameless, Belladonna, Demon Painter, Morgana, and *Philemon* behind the counter before, so it was pretty hard for a Velvet Room resident to catch him off guard in this particular way). "Be Blue V" was *very* on the nose, as far as names went.

"Hey, Margaret."

"I see you are not here for excessive discussion today. Would you care to try our crystal healing course?" The Attendant smiled politely, a Ping absently ringing out as she spoke to the boy who was not her usual Guest, but who was a guest regardless. "Has the past called to you, in such a way that although something has gone forgotten, you yearn to know it regardless?"

…something strange passed across Makoto's face at the question, shadowed as it was.

Margaret didn't catch it in time, but the emotions roiling across from her were hard to ignore.

"I shall prepare a private booth for you, then."

…

It had been too long.

Far too long.

Makoto couldn't help but focus on that, as he stared at the array of crystals across from him.

He - well, Persona-Loopers were, for a number of reasons, far more mentally healthy and stable than the average Looper was. (Not counting that - incident - when Akira started looping right after Igor had a Heat Death Loop…)

(It had taken Akira a *long* time to forgive their Anchor for it, but compared to some of the other Anchors, the master of the Velvet Room was still a *model* of mental stability and morality).

As long as Nyarlathotep didn't get involved-

No.

Focus.

It had been *years* since the last time he remembered to do this, and he *wouldn't* delay another second.

Makoto *gazed* at the crystals, so painstakingly set up by Margaret.

And between one second and the next, eyes *stared back*-

…

"MINATO!"

"Ack!"

As he entered the mindspace that was - well, it wasn't a Pocket, and it wasn't a Palace, and it wasn't like the Thieves' Den…

But regardless.

As Minako glomped him, Minato relaxed.

"It's been too long! Come on, let's go practice!"

Minako was grinning like mad, as she ran off into the anima behind her, changing from second to second beneath the golden glass that formed the roof of a soul's inner form.

(Sometimes, it looked like, through the glass, there was a night sky - other times, like they were at the bottom of the sea).

Sighing - but smiling regardless - Minato walked after her.

…

If anyone had been watching the musical instrument "duel" taking place right now, they would have been amazed that the instruments Minato and Minako were playing hadn't caught fire, from how fast their fingers were moving.

Minato and Minako would have ignored the comments as best they could - they were busy, at the moment.

Without pausing, Minako's eyes shot over to a scoreboard, even as Minato inhaled deeply.

It was tied.

"Dang it!"

Minako scowled, as Minato smiled. "I keep telling you, you need to slow down. You keep overshooting and hitting the notes too early." He stated calmly. "You're too caught up in what you're doing."

"Well, you keep missing yours and hitting them too late!" Minako shot back. "You need to get *more* into it!"

Minato inhaled - And then, before he could think of a retort, he sighed. "You're right. I… have been too uptight lately."

"You always are!" Minako replied. "You need to be more like me!"

"And you need to be more like me." Minato replied in turn.

There was silence for a moment.

Then, Minako started to giggle.

A few seconds after that, something happened that was - unusual, to say the least.

Minato started to giggle too.

That act, seemingly, was enough to set Minako off. Giggles became chuckles - which in turn, drove Minato to start chuckling too. Chuckles became laughter, from both of the twins, as Minako fell over howling, Minato toppling over less than a second later.

…

A few minutes later, the howls from Minato started to die down. Slowly, Minako's laughter died down as well, even if she was visibly having more trouble suppressing it.

"Oooohh… *Oooohh*... I needed that…"

"I know."

"Yeah, you would..."

"Well… *duh."*

…

A minute after that, Minato had finally calmed down. He was smiling, ever so lightly, as he got up.

Minako was smiling too. But judging by the giggles she was still in the throes of, she hadn't calmed down yet. Sighing, Minato walked over to her, before kneeling down. "Hey. Get up."

Minako didn't. Sighing, Minato reached over and started to pull her up. "T-thanks…" Minako replied, as she was yanked upright.

"No problem." Minato replied, staring at his twin as she righted herself. "It's what - *we* do."

"...Yeah. It's what *we* do." Minako's reply was unusually downcast. "Took you long enough to say it."

"...I know it's been too long. You don't have to tell me." Minato replied. His voice was more glum than usual.

"I know I don't have to tell you."

Minako closed her eyes with a sigh, before looking back at her brother.

And as she did, her eyes burned golden.

"You're already telling yourself."

…

As Makoto stared into the roof of their soul through two sets of eyes, the mouth attached to one of those eye sets opened.

"...Margaret's gonna be calling us soon."

"...I know."

There was silence for another few seconds.

"...it's been years since you let me out. Since you *talked to me at all.*" Minako quietly said.

"...I know. …I'm sorry." Minato didn't like forcing the words out. But they came out regardless. "I… I knew I shouldn't have kept putting it off."

"Then *WHY DIDN'T YOU?!* ***WHY, DAMMIT?!"***

Minato winced, as Minako shot to her feet.

"THEY'RE MY FRIENDS TOO! I MISS THEM! WHY DON'T YOU LET ME TALK TO THEM MORE?! ***I'M YOU TOO!!"***

Minato's fists clenched. "Because… I'm not *all* you."

He rose slowly - making sure, as he did, that he never broke eye contact with Minako's watering golden orbs.

"We aren't just me, and I'm sorry I forgot that... but *we* aren't just you, either."

"...we might be more you than me. But I'm part of us too." Minako sighed.

"...most people say people who talk to themselves are crazy." Minato sighed.

"Well, we're a Looper, aren't we?" Minako shot back, crossing her arms.

There was a chuckle.

Neither of them was sure who it came from.

(…was there any real difference?)

All of a sudden, without warning, the anima and animus surrounding them flared up - but neither of them blinked.

They knew what this meant.

"It's time." The two of them spoke as one.

"All right." Minato sighed, standing up. "I'll… try to see you more."

"Don't be a stranger, bro!" Minako shot back with a friendly grin, before reaching out a hand. "After all…"

Minato smiled back himself, even as he took her hand.

He knew what was coming. "I am thou…"

Minako kept smiling, even as she closed her eyes.

And slowly, she rose up –

And before he knew it, Makoto was staring up at the long-haired form of Orpheus.

And even as Orpheus formed, their hands never left each other.

"...and thou art I."

…

"Hey, guys!"

Junpei Iori, unAwake, nearly jumped out of his skin when he realized who that voice belonged to. "Makoto!?" He sputtered, turning around from his space in the otherwise-uninhabited room.

"Yup!"

...did I fall into a parallel universe when I wasn't looking, or something?

As their normally-glum leader continued to smile more in the span of a minute than he had in the six months beforehand, Junpei Iori was starting to think the answer might just be "yes".

He had been spending months now helping save the world from Shadows, in the hell-tower his school turned into in the 25th hour of the day. Why would he be skeptical about alternate timelines?

"You - uh - feeling okay?" Junpei asked carefully.

"Yup. Why wouldn't I be?" Makoto asked - okay, he was *still smiling,* Junpei was actually starting to get worried. Had a Shadow appeared outside the Dark Hour or something, and - was there a *Happiness* ailment, or something? …honestly, would it be a bad thing if Makoto had it? "Just feeling… in-tune with myself."

And - apparently, their glorious leader didn't feel like elaborating, because he had already started walking towards the stairs.

"Oh, and Junpei?"

"Uh, yeah?" Junpei asked quickly, gaze moving up. …wait, when did his hair get long enough for a *ponytail?* He kept it short! *WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON?!*

"Have a nice night!"

And then Makoto *blew him a kiss.*

…

"...Junpei? Did you seriously spend the whole night down here?"

The amount of concern in Yukari's voice caught Junpei off-guard, as he got up from the couch –

There was *light coming through the windows.* He - had he spent the entire night - *what the hell happened?!*

And then the memory came up, of Makoto *blowing him a kiss.*

"...Yuka-tan?"

"...what is it?" Yukari asked carefully.

Normally, she would have been - well, she wasn't sure - But the look in Junpei's eyes made her bite down any sarcastic remarks she might have made.

"...how do you tell somebody that's gay you don't see them that way?"

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